The most Reverend
Dr. IOHN TILLOTSON
late Arch Bishop of Canterbury.

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Sixteen Sermons,

ON

Several Subjects:

VIZ.

The Sin and Danger of adding to the Doctrine of the Goſpel.

Honeſty the beſt Preſervative againſt dangerous miſtakes in Religion.

The Nature, Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Covetouſneſs.

Religion our Firſt great Concernment.

The Wiſdom of Religion.

The Nature and Influence of the Promiſes of the Goſpel.

The Support of Good Men under their Sufferings for Religion.

Of the Work aſſigned to every Man, and the Seaſon for doing it.

By the Moſt Reverend

Dr. *JOHN TILLOTSON*,

Late Lord Arch-Biſhop of *Canterbury*.

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SERMON I.

The Sin and Danger of adding to the Doctrine of the Goſpel.

GALAT. 1. 8, 9.

But tho' We, or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed. As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, If any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.

BEfore I come to handle the Words, for our better underſtanding of them, I ſhall give a brief account of the occaſion of them, which was this. Some falſe Apoſtles had made

VOL. III. a great Diſturbance in the Churches planted by the Apoſtles of Chriſt, by Teaching that it was neceſſary for Chriſtians, not only to embrace, and entertain the Doctrines and Precepts of the Chriſtian Religion; but likewiſe to be Circumciſed, and keep the Law of *Moſes*. Of this Diſturbance which was raiſed in the Chriſtian Church, you have the Hiſtory at large, *Acts* 15. and as in ſeveral other Churches, ſo particularly in that of *Galatia*, theſe falſe Apoſtles and Seducers had perverted many, as appears by this Epiſtle; in the beginning whereof St. *Paul* complains, that thoſe who were ſeduced into this Error of the neceſſity of Circumciſion, and keeping the Law of *Moſes*, had by this new Article of Faith, which they had added to the Chriſtian Religion,. quite altered the frame of it, and made the Goſpel another thing from that which our Saviour delivered and commanded his Apoſtles to teach all Nations.

For he tells us, ver. 6. of this Chapter, that *he marvelled, that they were ſo ſoon removed from him that called them by (or through) the grace of Chriſt, unto another*

another Goſpel, that is, ſo different from that which they had been Inſtructed in by thoſe who firſt Preached the Goſpel unto them; For the making of any thing neceſſary to Salvation, which our Saviour in his Goſpel had not made ſo, he calls *another Goſpel*. *I marvel that ye are ſo ſoon removed from him that called you by the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel, which is not another,* ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο, *which is no other thing*, or *by which I mean nothing elſe, but that there are ſome that trouble you, and would pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt*; as if he had ſaid, when I ſay that *ye are removed to another Goſpel*, I do not mean, that ye have renounced Chriſtianity, and are gone over to another Religion, but that ye are ſeduced by thoſe who have a mind to pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt, by adding ſomething to it, as a neceſſary and eſſential part of it, which Chriſt hath not made ſo: This the Apoſtle calls a perverting or overthrowing of the Goſpel; becauſe by thus altering the Terms and Conditions of it, they made it quite another thing from what our Saviour delivered it. Serm. I.

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And then at the 8th and 9th Verſes he denounceth a terrible *Anathema* againſt thoſe, whoever they ſhould be, yea tho' it were an Apoſtle, or an Angel from Heaven, who by thus *perverting the Goſpel of Chriſt* (that is, by making any thing neceſſary to be believed or practiſed, which our Saviour in his Goſpel hath not made ſo) ſhould in effect *preach another Goſpel*; *but tho' we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be* Anathema, *an accurſed thing.* And then to expreſs his confidence and vehemency in this matter, and to ſhew that he did not ſpeak this raſhly, and in a heat, but upon due conſideration, he repeats it again in the next Verſe, *As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, if any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.*

From the Words thus explained by the conſideration of the Context, and of the main ſcope and deſign of this Epiſtle, theſe following *Obſervations* do naturally ariſe.

Firſt,

Serm. I.

Firſt, That the addition of any thing to the Chriſtian Religion, as neceſſary to be believed and practiſed in order to Salvation, is *a perverting the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another Goſpel.*

Secondly, That no pretence of Infallibility is ſufficient to authoriſe and warrant the addition of any thing to the Chriſtian Doctrine, as neceſſary to be believed and practiſed in order to Salvation.

Thirdly, That Chriſtians may judge and diſcern when ſuch additions are made.

Fourthly, And conſequently, That ſince the declaration of the Goſpel, and the confirmation of it, there is no Authority in the Chriſtian Church, to impoſe upon Chriſtians any thing as of neceſſity to Salvation, which the Goſpel hath not made ſo.

Fifthly, That there is no viſible Judge (how Infallible ſoever he may pretend to be) to whoſe Definitions

VOL. III. and declarations in Matters of Faith and Practice, neceſſary to Salvation, we are bound to ſubmit, without examination, whether theſe things be agreeable to the Goſpel of Chriſt, or not.

Sixthly, and *Laſtly*, Whoſoever Teacheth any thing as of neceſſity to Salvation, to be believed or practiſed, beſides what the Goſpel of Chriſt hath made neceſſary, does fall under the *Anathema* here in the Text; becauſe in ſo doing, *he perverteth the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preacheth another Goſpel.* Now the Apoſtle expreſly declares, *that tho' we* (that is, he himſelf, or any of the Apoſtles) or *an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Goſpel unto you, than what we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed: As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, If any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed.*

I. That the addition of any thing to the Chriſtian Religion, as neceſſary to be believed or practiſed in order to Salvation, is *a perverting the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another Goſpel.*

This

This is evident from the Inſtances here given in this Epiſtle; for the Apoſtle chargeth the falſe Apoſtles, with *perverting the Goſpel of Chriſt, and preaching another Goſpel*, upon no other account, but becauſe they added to the Chriſtian Religion, and made Circumciſion, and the keeping of the Law of *Moſes*, an eſſential part of the Chriſtian Religion, and impoſed upon Chriſtians the practice of theſe things, and the belief of the neceſſity of them, as a Condition of Eternal Salvation. Serm. I.

That this was the Doctrine of theſe falſe Teachers, we find expreſly, *Acts* 15. 1. *And certain men which came down from Judea, taught the Brethren, and ſaid, except ye be circumciſed after the manner of Moſes, ye cannot be ſaved*; and *ver.* 24. in the Letter written by the Apoſtles and Elders at *Jeruſalem*, to the Churches abroad, there is this account given of it; *foraſmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, ſubverting your Souls, ſaying ye muſt be circumciſed, and keep the Law, to whom we gave no ſuch Commandment.* Where

Vol. III. you see that this Doctrine is declared to be of pernicious consequence, tending *to subvert the Souls of Men*, and likewise to be an addition to the Doctrine of the Gospel which was delivered by the Apostles, who here with one consent declare, that *they had given no such commandment*; that is, had delivered no such Doctrine as this, nor put any such Yoke upon the Necks of Christians; but on the contrary had declared, that the Death of Christ having put an end to the *Jewish* Dispensation, there was now no Obligation upon Christians to observe the Law of *Moses*.

And from the Reason of the thing it is very plain, that the addition of any thing to the Christian Religion, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to Salvation, which the Gospel hath not made so, is *preaching another Gospel*; because it makes an essential change in the Terms and Conditions of the Gospel Covenant, which declares Salvation unto Men upon such and such Terms, and no other. Now to add any other Terms to these, as of equal necessity with them, is to alter the

the Condition of the Covenant of the Gospel, and the Terms of the Christian Religion, and consequently *to preach another Gospel*, by declaring other Terms of Salvation, than Christ in his Gospel hath declared, which is to *pervert the Gospel of Christ.* Serm. I.

II. No pretence of Infallibility is sufficient to Authorise and Warrant the addition of any thing to the Christian Doctrine, as necessary to be believed or practised, in order to Salvation. After the delivery of the Gospel by the Son of God, and the publication of it to the World by his Apostles, who were Commissioned and Inspired by him to that purpose, and the confirmation of all, by the greatest and most unquestionable Miracles that ever were, no person whatever, that brought any other Doctrine, and declared Salvation to Men upon any other Terms than those which are declared in the Gospel, was to be credited, what pretence soever he should make to a Divine Commission, or an Infallible Assistance. The Apostle makes a Supposition as high as can be, *tho' we* (says he) *or an Angel from Heaven preach any other*

other Goſpel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be an Anathema. If the Apoſtles themſelves, who were Divinely Commiſſioned and Infallibly Aſſiſted in the Preaching of the Goſpel, ſhould afterwards make any addition to it, or declare any other Terms of Salvation, than thoſe which are declared in the Goſpel which they had already publiſhed to the World, they ought not to be regarded.

And the Reaſon is plain; becauſe what claim ſoever any Perſon may make to Infallibility, and what demonſtration ſoever he may give of it, we cannot poſſibly believe him, if he contradict himſelf, and deliver Doctrines which do plainly claſh with one another: For if he ſpake true at firſt, I cannot believe him declaring the contrary afterwards: And if he did not ſpeak true at firſt, I cannot believe him at all; becauſe he can give no greater proof of his Divine Commiſſion, and Infallible Aſſiſtance and Inſpiration, than he did at firſt.

And

And the Reaſon is the ſame, if *an Angel from Heaven* ſhould come and Preach a contrary Doctrine to that of the Goſpel, *he* were not to be believed neither; becauſe he could bring no better Credentials of his Divine Commiſſion and Authority, than Thoſe had who Publiſh'd the Goſpel, and conſequently he ought not to be credited in any thing contrary to what they had Publiſhed before. For tho' a Man were never ſo much diſpoſed to receive a Revelation from God, and to ſubmit his Faith to it; yet it is not poſſible for any Man to believe God againſt God himſelf; that is, to believe two Revelations, plainly contradictory to one another, to be from God; and the Reaſon of this is very obvious; becauſe every Man doth firſt and more firmly believe this Propoſition or Principle, *That Contradictions cannot be true*, than any Revelation whatſoever; for if Contradictions may be true, then no Revelation from God can ſignifie any thing, becauſe the contrary may be equally true, and ſo Truth and Falſehood be all one. Serm. I.

The

Vol. III. The Apostle indeed only makes a *Supposition*, when he says, *tho' we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Doctrine unto you*; but by this *Supposition* he plainly bars any Man, or Company of Men, from adding to the Christian Religion any Article of Faith or point of Practice, as of necessity to Salvation, which the Gospel hath not made so; I say any Man, or Company of Men, whatever Authority or Infallibility they may lay claim to, because they cannot pretend to a clearer Commission and greater Evidence of Infallible Assistance, than *an Apostle*, or *an Angel from Heaven*, and yet the Text tells us, *that* would not be a sufficient warrant to preach another Gospel; it might indeed bring in question that which they had preached before, but could not give Credit and Authority to any thing plainly contrary to it, and inconsistent with it.

III. Christians may judge and discern when *another Gospel is preached*, when new Articles of Faith, or Points of Practice, not enjoyned by the Gospel are imposed upon Christians. This the

the Apoſtle ſuppoſeth every particular Church, and for ought I know every particular Chriſtian, that is duly Inſtructed in the Chriſtian Religion, to be a competent Judge of, and to be ſufficiently able to diſcern when *another Goſpel is preached*, and new Terms and Conditions, not declared in the Goſpel, are added to the Chriſtian Religion; for if they be not able to judge of this, the Apoſtle does in vain caution them againſt the ſeduction of thoſe *who perverted the Doctrine of Chriſt, and endeavoured to remove them from him that had called them by the grace of Chriſt, unto another Goſpel.* Serm. I.

It may perhaps be ſaid, that there was no need that they ſhould be able to diſcern and judge of the Doctrines of thoſe falſe Teachers, it was ſufficient for them to believe the Apoſtle concerning the Doctrines of thoſe Seducers, when he declared to them the falſhood and pernicious conſequence of them. But the Apoſtle ſpeaks to them upon another ſuppoſition, which does neceſſarily imply, that they were able to diſcern and judge what Doctrines were agreeable to the Goſpel, and

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and what not; for he puts the Case, that if he himself, or any of the Apostles, or an Angel from Heaven, should Preach to them another Doctrine, contrary to that of the Gospel, they ought to reject it with detestation; but this doth necessarily suppose them able to judge, when such Doctrines were Preached, and consequently that all things necessary to be believed and practised by all Christians are clearly and plainly declared in the Gospel; all the Doctrines whereof are now contained in the Holy Scriptures, in which all things necessary to Faith and a good Life are so plainly delivered, that any sober and inquisitive Person may learn them from thence, and the meanest Capacity, by the help and direction of their Guides and Teachers, may be Instructed in them.

And this is not only the Principle of Protestants, but the express and constant Doctrine of the Ancient Fathers of the Church, whatever the Church of *Rome*, for the maintaining of her usurped Authority over the Consciences of Men, pretends to the contrary.

trary. And if this were not ſo, that Men are able to diſcern and judge which are the Doctrines of the Goſpel, and what is contrary to them; the Doctrine of the Goſpel was in vain Preached, and the Holy Scriptures containing that Doctrine were written to no purpoſe. Serm. I.

Some things in Scripture are granted to be obſcure and difficult, on purpoſe to exerciſe the Study and Enquiries of thoſe who have leiſure and capacity for it: But all things neceſſary are ſufficiently plain; otherwiſe it would be impoſſible to judge when *another Goſpel is preached*, which the Apoſtle here ſuppoſeth the *Galatians* capable of doing. For if the Revelation of the Goſpel be not ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary to be believed and practiſed, then Chriſtians have no Rule whereby to judge what Doctrines are agreeable to the Goſpel, and what not: For an obſcure Rule is of no uſe; that is, in truth is no Rule to thoſe to whom it is obſcure.

I proceed to the IVth *Obſervation*, which is plainly conſequent from thoſe laid

Vol. III. laid down before; namely, that ſince the Declaration of the Goſpel, and the Confirmation given to it, there is no Authority in the Chriſtian Church to impoſe upon Chriſtians any thing, as of neceſſity to Salvation, which the Goſpel hath not made ſo.

The Commiſſion given by our Lord and Saviour to his Apoſtles, was *to preach the Goſpel to all Nations*, or (as St. *Matthew* expreſſes it) *to go and teach all Nations, to obſerve all things whatſoever he had commanded them*; and this is that which we call the *Goſpel*, *viz.* that Doctrine which Chriſt commanded his Apoſtles to Preach and Publiſh to the World; and if the Apoſtles themſelves had exceeded their Commiſſion, and added any other Points of Faith or Practice to thoſe which our Saviour gave them in charge to teach and publiſh to the World, they had in ſo doing been guilty of that which St. *Paul* here in the Text chargeth the falſe Apoſtles with, *viz.* of *preaching another Goſpel*, And if the Apoſtles had no Authority to add any thing to the Goſpel, much leſs can any pretend to it; ſince they have neither ſo immediate a Commiſſion,

ſion, nor ſuch a miraculous power to give teſtimony to them, that *they are Teachers come from God.* Serm. I.

Now this Doctrine of the Goſpel, which the Apoſtles preached to the World, is that which Chriſtians are ſo often, and ſo earneſtly by the Apoſtles in all their Epiſtles *Exhorted to continue in, and not to ſuffer themſelves to be ſhaken in mind, by every wind of new Doctrine,* becauſe that which the Apoſtles had delivered to them, was the intire Doctrine of the Goſpel, which was never to receive any addition or alteration. This is that which St. *Peter* calls *the Holy Commandment which was delivered unto them,* 2 Pet. 2. 21. *It had been better for them not to have known the way of Righteouſneſs, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy Commandment delivered unto them,* ſpeaking in all probability of thoſe who were ſeduced by the errors of the *Gnoſticks,* from the purity of the Chriſtian Doctrine delivered to them by the Apoſtles. This likewiſe St. *Paul* calls *the common Faith,* Titus 1. 4. and St. *Jude* ver. 3. *the common Salvation*; that is, the Doctrine which contains the com-

mon Terms of our Salvation, and *the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints*, that is, by the Apostles of our Lord, who publish'd the Gospel; *once delivered*, that is, once for all, so as never afterwards to admit of any change or alteration. This Faith he *exhorts* Christians *earnestly to contend for*, against those several Sects of Seducers, which were crept into the Christian Church, and did endeavour by several Arts *to pervert the Gospel of Christ*, and to deprave *the Faith delivered* by the Apostles.

So that the Doctrine of the Gospel publish'd by the Apostles, is fix'd and unalterable, and there can be no Authority in the Church to make any change in it, either by taking from it, or adding any thing to it, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to Salvation.

V. It follows likewise from the foregoing Observations, that there is no *visible Judge* (how much soever he may pretend to *Infallibility*) to whose determination and decision in matters of Faith and Practice necessary

to

to Salvation, Chriſtians are bound to ſubmit without examination, whether thoſe things be agreeable to the Doctrine of the Goſpel, or not. Serm. I.

When our Saviour appeared in the World, tho' he had Authority enough to exact belief from Men, yet becauſe there was a ſtanding Revelation of God made to the *Jews*, he appeals to that Revelation, as well as to his own Miracles, for the truth of what he ſaid, and offered himſelf, and his Doctrine, to be tried by the agreeableneſs of it to the Scriptures of the Old Teſtament, and the Predictions therein concerning him. And this was but reaſonable, it being impoſſible for any Man to receive two Revelations, as from God, without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to, and conſiſtent with one another. In like manner the Apoſtles of our Lord and Saviour, tho' they were guided and aſſiſted by an Infallible Spirit, and had an immediate Commiſſion from Chriſt to preach the Doctrine of the Goſpel, did not require from Men abſolute ſubmiſſion to their Doctrines and Dictates, without examination of what they delivered, whe-

ther it were agreeable to that Divine Revelation which was contained in the ancient Scriptures.

This was St. *Paul*'s constant custom and way of teaching among the *Jews*, who had received the Revelation of the Old Testament; he did not dictate to them by vertue of his Infallibility, but *reasoned with them out of the Scriptures*, and required their belief no further, than what he said, should upon examination appear agreeable to the Scriptures. So we find *Act.* 17. 2, 3. *And* Paul, *as his manner was, went in unto them* (speaking of the *Jews*) *and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alledging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you, is the Christ.* And *Chap.* 18. 28. *he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was the Christ.* And St. *Paul* was so far from reproving them for examining his Doctrine by the Scriptures, that he commended it, as an argument of a Noble and Generous mind in the *Bereans*, that they did not give full assent

to

to his Doctrine, till upon due ſearch and examination they were ſatisfied that what he had ſaid was agreeable to the Scriptures. *Chap.* 17. 11, 12. Where ſpeaking of the *Bereans*, it is ſaid, *That theſe were more noble than thoſe in Theſſalonica, in that they received the word, with all readineſs of mind, and ſearched the Scriptures daily, whether thoſe things were ſo; therefore many of them believed*; that is, becauſe upon ſearch they found what he delivered to be agreeable to the Scriptures; and it was not a ſlight, but diligent and deliberate ſearch, they took time to examine things thoroughly; for it is ſaid *they ſearched the Scriptures daily*. And here in the Text St. *Paul* puts the caſe, that if he, or any other of the Apoſtles, concerning whoſe Divine Commiſſion and Aſſiſtance they were ſo fully ſatisfied, ſhould deliver any thing to them contrary to the Goſpel which they had formerly preached, they were to reject it with the greateſt abhorrence and deteſtation; and this neceſſarily ſuppoſeth a liberty to examine what was delivered, even by thoſe whom they believed to be Infallibly aſſiſted, and a capacity to diſcern Serm. I.

ſcern and judge whether what they ſaid was agreeable to the Goſpel at firſt delivered to them, or not.

And after this, ſhall any Perſon or Church (what Claim ſoever they may make to Infallibility) aſſume to themſelves an Authority to dictate in matters of Faith, and that their Dictates ought to be received with an abſolute ſubmiſſion, and without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to *the Faith once delivered to the Saints*; and tho' they add new Articles to the Chriſtian Faith, and of which there is not the leaſt foot-ſtep or intimation in any of the Ancient Creeds of the Chriſtian Church, and do plainly impoſe upon Chriſtians the Practice and Belief of ſeveral things as neceſſary to Salvation, which the Goſpel never declared to be ſo, yet no body ſhall judge of this, but every Man ought without more ado, to believe blindfold, and to reſign up his Underſtanding and Judgment to the directions of this *viſible Infallible Judge?*

But ſurely this is not the reaſonable *Obedience of Faith*, but the forc'd ſubmiſſion

miſſion of Slaves to the Tyranny of their Maſters. Chriſtians are expreſly forbid *to call any Man Father or Maſter upon Earth*, becauſe *we have one Father and Maſter in Heaven.* Now to make an abſolute ſubmiſſion of our Underſtandings to any upon Earth, ſo as without examination to receive their Dictates in Matters of Faith, is ſurely, if any thing can be ſo, *to call ſuch a Perſon Father or Maſter*, becauſe a greater ſubmiſſion than this we cannot pay to *our Father who is in Heaven*, even to God himſelf. I come now to the Serm. I.

VI. and laſt *Obſervation* from the Text; That whoſoever teacheth any thing as of neceſſity to Salvation, to be believed or practiſed, beſides what the Goſpel of Chriſt hath made neceſſary, does fall under the *Anathema* here in the Text; becauſe they that do ſo, do according to the mind of St. *Paul*, *pervert the Goſpel of Chriſt, and Preach another Goſpel.* For the Reaſon why he chargeth the falſe Apoſtles with *Preaching another Goſpel*, and thoſe that were ſeduced by them, as *being removed from him that called them by the Grace of Chriſt unto another Goſpel*,

Vol. III. is plainly this; that they had changed the Terms of the Chriſtian Religion, by adding new Articles to it, which were not contained in the Goſpel; that is, by making it neceſſary to believe it to be ſo, becauſe *they* taught ſo. Now St. *Paul* expreſly declares this to be *Preaching another Goſpel*, becauſe they plainly alter'd the Terms of Salvation declared in the Goſpel, and made that to be neceſſary to the Salvation of Men, which the Goſpel had not made ſo.

And whatever Perſon or Church does the ſame, does incur the ſame guilt, and falls under the *Anathema* and Cenſure here in the Text; yea, *tho' he were an Apoſtle, or an Angel:* And I am ſure no Biſhop or Church in the World can pretend either to an equal Authority or Infallibility with *an Apoſtle, or an Angel from Heaven.*

Let us then hear what St. *Paul* declares in this Caſe, and conſider ſeriouſly, with what earneſtneſs and vehemency he declares it; *tho' we* (ſays he) *or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which*

which we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed. As we ſaid before, ſo ſay I now again, If any man preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accurſed. St. *Paul* you ſee is very earneſt in this matter, and very peremptory, and therefore I cannot but think this Declaration of his to be more conſiderable, and every way more worthy of our regard and dread, than all the *Anathema*'s of the *Council of Trent*, which in direct affront and contempt of this *Anathema* of St. *Paul*, hath preſumed to add ſo many Articles to the Chriſtian Religion, upon the counterfeit warrant of Tradition, for which there is no ground or warrant from the Scripture, or from any Ancient Creed of the Chriſtian Church. Serm. I.

And for the Truth of this, I appeal to the Creed of Pope *Pius* the IVth, compiled out of the Definitions of *the Council of Trent*; by which *Council* the *Pope* only is Authoriſed to Interpret the true ſenſe and meaning of the Canons and Decrees of that *Council*; and conſequently his interpretations muſt be of equal force and authority with

with that of the *Council* it ſelf. So that whatſoever he hath put into his new Creed for an Article of Faith, ought to be received with the ſame pious affection and veneration, as if the Creed had been compiled by the *Council* it ſelf; becauſe the *Pope*, it ſeems, and no body elſe underſtands the true meaning of that *Council*, at leaſt is thought fit to declare it. And therefore one may juſtly wonder at the preſumption of thoſe, who after this Declaration of the Council, have taken upon them to *Expound the Catholick Faith*, and *to repreſent* that Religion to us, as it is defined in that *Council*; becauſe if there be any Controverſie about the meaning of its Definitions (as there have been a great many even betwixt thoſe who were preſent at the Council when thoſe Definitions were made) none but the *Pope* himſelf can certainly tell the meaning of them.

Now in this Creed of Pope *Pius* there are added to the Ancient Creed of the Chriſtian Church twelve or thirteen new Articles, as concerning *Purgatory*, *Tranſubſtantiation*, *the Worſhip of Images*, *the Invocation of Saints*, *the*

the Communion in one kind, and that *the Church of* Rome *is the Mother and Miſtreſs of all Churches*, and *that there is no Salvation to be had out of it*; and ſeveral other Points, all which have either no foundation in Scripture, or are plainly contrary to it, and none of them ever eſteemed as *Articles of Faith* in the Ancient Chriſtian Church for the firſt five hundred years; and yet they are now obtruded upon Chriſtians, as of equal neceſſity to Salvation, with *the Twelve Articles of the Apoſtles Creed*, and this under a pretence of Infallibility, which St. *Paul* tells us would not have juſtified *an Apoſtle*, or *an Angel from Heaven*, in making ſuch additions to the Chriſtian Religion, and the impoſing of any thing as neceſſary to Salvation, which is not ſo declared by the Goſpel of Chriſt. Serm. I.

And all that they have to ſay for this, is, That *We* do not pretend to be Infallible; but there is a neceſſity of an Infallible Judge to decide theſe Controverſies, and to him they are to be referred. Which is juſt as if in a plain matter of Right, a contentious and confident Man ſhould deſire a reference

Vol. III. ference, and contrive the matter ſo as to have it refer'd to himſelf, upon a ſleeveleſs pretence, without any proof or evidence, that he is the only Perſon in the World that hath Authority and Infallible Skill to decide all ſuch differences. Thus the *Church of Rome* would deal with us in Things which are as plain as the noon-day; as Whether God hath forbidden the Worſhip of Images in the ſecond Commandment? Whether our Saviour did Inſtitute the Sacrament in both kinds? Whether the People ought not to read the Scriptures, and to have the Publick Service of God in a known Tongue? Theſe, and the like, they would have us refer to an Infallible Judge; and when we ask who he is, they tell us that their Church, which hath impoſed theſe things upon Chriſtians, and made theſe additions to the Goſpel of Chriſt, is that Infallible Judge. But if ſhe were as Infallible as ſhe pretends to be, even as *an Apoſtle, or an Angel from Heaven*, St. *Paul* hath denounced an *Anathema* againſt her, for *preaching another Goſpel*, and making thoſe things neceſſary to the Salvation of Men, which

which are not contained in *the Goſpel of Chriſt.* Serm. I.

The *Inference* from all this Diſcourſe in ſhort, is this; That *we ſhould contend earneſtly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints*, and not ſuffer our ſelves by the confident pretences of Seducers, *to be removed from him that hath called us through the grace of Chriſt unto another Goſpel.* The neceſſary Doctrines of the Chriſtian Religion, and the common Terms of Salvation are ſo plain, that if any Man be ignorant of them, it is his own fault; and if any go about to impoſe upon us any thing as of neceſſity to be believed and practiſed in order to Salvation, which is not declared to be ſo in the Holy Scriptures, which contain the true Doctrine of the Goſpel, what Authority ſoever they pretend for it, yea, tho' they aſſume to themſelves to be Infallible; the Apoſtle hath plainly told us what we are to think of them; for he hath put the Caſe as high as is poſſible here in the Text, when he ſays, *Tho' We, or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Goſpel unto you, than that which we*

we have preached unto you, let him be accurſed.

I will conclude all with that Counſel which the Spirit of God gives to the Churches of *Aſia*, Rev. 3. 3. *Remember therefore how thou haſt received and heard, and hold faſt*; and Chap. 2. 10. *Fear none of thoſe things which thou ſhalt ſuffer: be thou faithful unto the Death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life.*

SERM-

SERMON II.

Honesty the best Preservative against dangerous mistakes in Religion.

JOHN VII. 17.

If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.

SINCE there are so many different Opinions and Apprehensions in the World about Matters of Religion, and every Sect and Party does with so much confidence pretend that *they*, and *they only*, are in the truth; The great difficulty and question is, by what means Men may be secured from dangerous Errors and Mistakes in Religion. For this end some have

Vol. III. have thought it neceſſary that there ſhould be *an Infallible Church*, in the Communion whereof every Man may be ſecured from the dangers of a wrong Belief. But it ſeems God hath not thought this neceſſary: If he had, he would have revealed this very thing more plainly than any particular Point of Faith whatſoever. He would have told us expreſly, and in the plaineſt terms, that he had appointed *an Infallible Guide and Judge in matters of Faith*, and would likewiſe have told us as plainly who he was, and where we might find him, and have recourſe to him upon all occaſions; becauſe the ſincerity of our Faith depending upon him, we could not be ſafe from miſtake in particular Points, without ſo plain and clear a Revelation of this *Infallible Judge*, that there could be no miſtake about him; nor could there be an end of any other Controverſies in Religion, unleſs this *Infallible Judge* (both that there is one, and who he is) were out of Controverſie. But neither of theſe are ſo: It is not plain from Scripture that there is *an Infallible Judge and Guide in Matters of Faith*; much leſs is it plain who he is; and

therefore

therefore we may certainly conclude, Serm. II.
that God hath not thought it neceſſary
that there ſhould be *an Infallible Guide and Judge in Matters of Faith*, becauſe he hath revealed no ſuch thing to us; and *that Biſhop*, and *that Church* who only have arrogated *Infallibility* to themſelves, have given the greateſt evidence in the World to the contrary; and have been detected, and ſtand convinc'd of the greateſt Errors: And it is in vain for any Man, or Company of Men, to pretend to *Infallibility*, ſo long as the evidence that *they are deceived* is much greater and clearer than any proof they can produce for their *Infallibility*.

If then God hath not provided *an Infallible Guide and Judge in Matters of Faith*; there is ſome other way whereby Men may be ſecured againſt dangerous and damnable Errors in Religion, and whereby they may diſcern Truth from Impoſture, and what Doctrines are from God, and what not; and this our Saviour declares to us here in the Text, namely, That an honeſt and ſincere mind, and a hearty deſire to do the Will of God, is the beſt Preſerva-

tive againſt fatal Errors and Miſtakes in Matters of Religion; ἐάν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν *If any Man deſire to do his Will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of my ſelf.*

There are *Two* dangerous Miſtakes in Religion: To reject any thing which really comes from God; and To receive and entertain any thing as from God, which doth not really come from him.

Firſt, To reject any thing which really comes from God. This Miſtake the *Jews* frequently fell into, when they rejected the true Prophets which God from time to time ſent to them, ſlighting their Meſſage, and perſecuting their Perſons: But they miſcarried moſt fatally and remarkably in their contempt of the true *Meſſias*, that great Prophet whom they had ſo long expected, and whom God ſent at laſt, to bring Salvation to them; but when he came, they knew him not, nor would receive him, but uſed him with all the deſpight and contempt imaginable, not as *a Teacher come from God*, but as a Deceiver, and Impoſtor.

Now

Now the danger of rejecting any thing that comes from God, consists in this, that it cannot be done with out the highest Affront to the Divine Majesty. To reject a Divine Message, or Revelation, is to oppose God, and *fight against him.* So our Saviour tells the *Jews*, that *in despising him, they despised him that sent him.* Serm. II.

Secondly, There is also another dangerous Mistake on the other hand, in entertaining any thing as a Revelation from God, which is not really from him. And this likewise the *Jews* were frequently guilty of, in receiving the false Prophets which spake in the name of the Lord, when he had not sent them. And this is commonly the temper of those who reject the Truth, greedily to swallow Error and Delusion. So our Saviour tells us of the *Jews*, John 5. 43. *I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.* This Prediction of our Saviour's concerning the *Jews*, was fully accomplish'd; for after they had rejected him, who gave such abundant evidence

Vol. III. that he was the true *Meſſias*, and *a Teacher ſent from God*, they received others, who really *came in their own names*, and ran after thoſe who pretended to be the *Meſſias*, and were in great numbers deſtroyed with them. And this is very juſt with God, that *thoſe who receive not the truth in the love of it, ſhould be given up to ſtrong deluſions, to believe lies.*

Now theſe being the *Two* great dangerous Miſtakes in Religion which Men are liable to, my Work at this time ſhall be to ſhew, how a ſincere deſire and endeavour *to do the will of God*, is a ſecurity to Men againſt both thoſe dangers; and it will appear to be ſo, upon theſe *Two* accounts.

I. Becauſe he who ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the Will of God, is hereby better qualified and diſpoſed to make a right Judgment of Spiritual and Divine Things.

II. Becauſe God's Providence is more eſpecially concerned to ſecure ſuch Perſons from dangerous Errors and Miſtakes in things which concern their Eternal

Eternal Salvation. Theſe ſhall be the *Two* Heads of my following Diſcourſe. Serm. II.

Firſt, becauſe he who ſincerely deſires and endeavours to do the Will of God, is hereby better qualified and diſpoſed to make a right Judgment of Spiritual and Divine Things, and that for theſe *Two* Reaſons,

1. Becauſe ſuch a Perſon hath a truer Notion of God, and Divine Things.

2. Becauſe he is more impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after Truth.

1. Becauſe ſuch a Perſon hath a truer Notion of God and Divine Things. No Man is ſo likely to have clear and true Apprehenſions of God, as a good Man, becauſe he hath tranſcribed the Divine Perfections in his own Mind, and is himſelf in ſome meaſure and degree what God is. And for this Reaſon it is, that the Scripture ſo often lays the foundation of all Divine Knowledge in the practice of Religion. *Job* 28. 28. *The fear of the Lord, that is Wiſdom, and to depart from Evil, is Underſtanding*; and *Pſal.* 111. 10. *The*

fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wiſdom that is, the Principle and Foundation of it; *a good underſtanding have all they that do his Commandments:* Whereas the Vices and Luſts of Men darken their Reaſon, and diſtort their Underſtandings, and fill the Mind with groſs and ſenſual Apprehenſions of Things, and thereby render Men unfit to diſcern thoſe Truths which are of a Spiritual Nature and tendency, and altogether indiſpoſed to receive them. For tho' the Vices of Men be properly ſeated in their Wills, and do not poſſeſs their Underſtandings; yet they have a bad influence upon them, as Fumes and Vapours from the Stomach are wont to affect the Head.

Nothing indeed is more natural to the Mind and Underſtanding of Men, than the Knowledge of God; but we may abuſe our Faculties, and render them unfit for the diſcerning even of their proper Objects.

When Men by wicked Practices have rendred themſelves unlike to God, they will not love to *retain the knowledge of him* in their Minds, but will *become*

become vain in their Imaginations concerning him. What Clouds and Miſts are to the Bodily Eye, that the Luſts and Corruptions of Men are to the Underſtanding; they hinder it from a clear perception of Heavenly Things; *the pure in heart*, they are beſt qualified for *the ſight of God*. Serm. II.

Now according as a Man's Notions of God are, ſuch will be his Apprehenſions of Religion. All Religion is either *Natural*, or *Revealed*: *Natural Religion* conſiſts in the belief of a God, and in right Conceptions and Apprehenſions concerning him, and in a due Reverence and obſervance of him, and in a ready and chearful Obedience to thoſe Laws which he hath imprinted upon our Nature; and the Sum of our Obedience conſiſts in our conformity to God, and an endeavour to be like him. For, ſuppoſing God to have made no External Revelation of his Mind to us, we have no other way to know his Will, but by conſidering his Nature, and our own; and if ſo, then he that reſembles God moſt, is like to underſtand him beſt, becauſe he finds thoſe Perfections in ſome meaſure in

himſelf, which he contemplates in the Divine Nature; and nothing gives a Man ſo ſure a Notion of Things, as Practice and Experience: Every good Man is in ſome degree *partaker of a Divine Nature*, and feels that in himſelf, which he conceives to be in God: So that this Man does experience what others do but talk of; he ſees the Image of God in himſelf, and is able to Diſcourſe of him from an inward ſenſe and feeling of his Excellency, and Perfections.

And as for *Revealed Religion*, the only Deſign of that is, to revive and improve the *Natural* Notions which we have of God; and all our Reaſonings about Divine Revelation, are neceſſarily gathered by our Natural Notions of Religion: and therefore he that ſincerely endeavours *to do the Will of God*, is not apt to be impoſed upon by the vain and confident pretences of Divine Revelation; but if any Doctrine be propoſed to him, which pretends to come from God, he meaſures it by thoſe ſteady and ſure Notions which he hath of the Divine Nature and Perfections, and by thoſe he will eaſily diſ-

diſcern whether it be worthy of God, Serm. II.
or not, and likely to proceed from him: He will conſider the Nature and tendency of it, and whether it be (as the Apoſtle expreſſes it) *a Doctrine according to Godlineſs*, ſuch as is agreeable to the Divine Nature and Perfections, and tends to make us like to God: If it be not, tho' *an Angel from Heaven* ſhould bring it, he will not receive it: If it be, he will not reject it upon every idle pretence, and frivolous exception that prejudiced and ill-minded Men may make againſt it; but after he is ſatisfied of the reaſonableneſs and purity of the Doctrine, he will accept of ſuch evidence and confirmation of it, as is fit for God to give to his own Revelations; and if the Perſon that brings it, hath the atteſtation of *Miracles* (which is neceſſary in caſe it be a new Doctrine) and if he carry on no Earthly Intereſt and Deſign by it, but does by his Life and Actions make it evident that he aims at the Glory of God, and the good of Men, in this Caſe a good Man, whoſe Mind is free from paſſion and prejudice, will eaſily aſſent, that this Man's *Doctrine is of God, and that he does not ſpeak of himſelf.* This was the

the Evidence which our Saviour offered to the *Jews* in vindication of himſelf, and his Doctrine, *Joh.* 7. 18. *He that ſpeaketh of himſelf, ſeeketh his own glory: but he that ſeeketh his glory that ſent him, the ſame is true, and no unrighteouſneſs is in him*; as if he had ſaid, hereby may you diſtinguiſh one that really comes from God, from an Impoſtor: If any Man *ſeek his own glory*, you may conclude that *God hath not ſent him*, but whatever he pretends, that *he ſpeaks of himſelf*; but he who by his Life, and the courſe of his Actions demonſtrates that *he ſeeks the honour of God*, and not any intereſt and advantage of *his own*, *the ſame is true, and there is no unrighteouſneſs in him*; that is, no falſhood or deſign to deceive (for ſo the Word ἀδικία does ſometimes ſignifie;) you may conclude ſuch an one to be no Deceiver, or Impoſtor. And if any Man ſincerely deſires and endeavours *to do the Will of God*, he may by ſuch Marks and Characters as theſe, judge of any *Doctrine* that pretends to be *from God*, whether it be ſo or not. This is the *firſt* Reaſon; becauſe he that ſincerely deſires and endeavours *to do the will*

will of God, hath the trueſt Notion of God, and of Divine Things. Serm. II.

2. Such a Perſon is more impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after Truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to diſcern it from Error. He that hath an honeſt Mind, and ſincerely endeavours *to do the will of God*, is not apt to be ſwayed and biaſſed by any Intereſt or Luſt: For his great Intereſt is to pleaſe God, and he makes all his other Intereſts and Concernments to ſtoop and yield to that. But if a Man be governed by any earthly Intereſt or Deſign, he will meaſure all things by that, and is not at liberty to entertain any thing that croſſes it, and to judge equally of any Doctrine that is oppoſite to his Intereſt. This our Saviour gives for a Reaſon, why the great *Rabbies* and Teachers among the *Jews* did not believe and embrace his Doctrine, *John* 5. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?* If Men have any other Deſign in Religion than to pleaſe God, and to advance his Honour and Glory in the World, no wonder if they be apt to reject the moſt Divine Truths; becauſe theſe

theſe are Calculated, not to approve us to Men, but to God,

And as Vain-glory, and deſire of the Applauſe of Men; ſo likewiſe doth every other Luſt make a Man partial in his Judgment of Things, and clap a falſe Biaſs upon his Underſtanding, which carries it off from Truth, and makes it to lean towards that ſide of the Queſtion which is moſt favourable to the Intereſt of his Luſts. A Vicious Man is not willing to entertain thoſe Truths which would croſs and check him in his courſe: He hath made the Truth his Enemy, and therefore he thinks himſelf concern'd to oppoſe it, and riſe up againſt it: The light of it offends him, and therefore he ſhuts his Eyes that he may not ſee it. Thoſe holy and pure Doctrines, which are from God, reprove the Luſts of Men, and diſcover the Deformity of them; and therefore no wonder if bad Men be ſo hard to be reconciled to them. This account our Saviour likewiſe gives of the fierce Enmity of the *Jews* to him, and his Doctrine, *Joh.* 3. 19, 20. *Light is come into the World, and Men loved darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their deeds*

deeds were evil; for every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved. Serm. II.

The vicious Inclinations of Men are *a dead weight* upon their Underſtandings, and able to draw down the Scales againſt the cleareſt Truths: For tho' it be abſolutely in no Man's Power to believe, or to diſ-believe what he will; yet Men's Lives have many times a great influence upon their Underſtandings, to make Aſſent eaſie, or difficult; and as we are forward to believe what we have a mind to, ſo are we very backward and ſlow in yielding our Aſſent to any thing that croſſeth our Inclinations. Men that allow themſelves in *ungodlineſs and worldly luſts*, will not eaſily believe thoſe Doctrines which charge Men ſo ſtrictly with all manner of Holineſs, and Purity.

This is the way which the Devil hath always uſed to *blind the eyes of Men, that the light of the glorious Goſpel of Chriſt might not ſhine into them.* And certainly the moſt effectual way to keep Men in Infidelity, is to debauch them

them in their Lives; therefore the Apoſtle gives this as the Reaſon of the Infidelity of Men in the laſt Times, 2 *Theſ.* 2. 12. *They believed not the Truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs.* When Men once abandon themſelves to lewd and vicious Practices, Infidelity becomes their Intereſt, becauſe they have no other way to defend and excuſe a wicked Life, but by denying the Truth which oppoſeth it, and finds fault with it.

That Man only ſtands fair for the entertainment of Truth, who is under the Dominion of no Vice, or Luſt; becauſe he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to ſeduce him, or draw him aſide in his Enquiry after Truth; he hath no Intereſt but to find the Truth, and follow it: He is enquiring after the way to Heaven, and Eternal Happineſs, and he hath the indifferency of a Traveller which is not inclined to go this way rather than another; for his concernment is to find out the right way, and to walk in it: Such an indifferency of Mind hath every good Man, who ſincerely deſires *to do the will of God*; he ſtands ready to receive Truth, when ſufficient

ſufficient Evidence is offered to convince him of it; becauſe he hath no manner of concernment that the contrary Propoſition ſhould be true. As in *Mathematicks*, a Man is ready to give his Aſſent to any Propoſition, that is ſufficiently demonſtrated to him, becauſe he hath no inclination or affection to one ſide of the Queſtion more than to the other; all his Deſign and Concernment is to find out the Truth on which ſide ſoever it lies; and he is like to find it, becauſe he is ſo indifferent, and impartial. But if a Man be biaſs'd by any Luſt, and addicted to any vicious Practice, he is then an intereſted Perſon, and concerned to be partial in his Judgment of Things, and is under a great temptation to Infidelity, when the Truths of God are propoſed to him; becauſe whatever the Evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of that Doctrine, which is ſo contrary to his Inclination and Intereſt. If the Affections and Intereſts of Men were as deeply concerned, and as ſenſibly touched in the truth of *Mathematical* Propoſitions, as they are in the Principles of *Morality*, and *Religion*, we

we ſhould find, that when a Propoſition ſtood in their way, and lay croſs to their Intereſt, tho it were never ſo clearly demonſtrated, yet they would raiſe a duſt about it, and make a thouſand cavils, and fence even againſt the evidence of a *Demonſtration*; they would palliate their Error with all the Skill and Art they could; and tho' the abſurdity of it was never ſo great and palpable, yet they would hold it faſt againſt all Senſe and Reaſon, and face down Mankind in the obſtinate defence of it; for we have no reaſon to doubt, but that they who in Matters of *Religion* will believe directly contrary to what they ſee, would if they had the ſame Intereſt and Paſſions to ſway them in the caſe, believe contrary to the cleareſt *Mathematical Demonſtration*; for where there is an obſtinate Reſolution not to be convinc'd, all the Reaſon and Evidence in the World ſignifies nothing.

Whereas he that is biaſſed by no Paſſion or Intereſt, but hath an honeſt Mind, and is ſincerely deſirous to *do the Will of God*, ſo far as he knows it, is likely to judge very impartially concerning

cerning any Doctrines that are propoſed to him: For if there be not good Evidence that they are *from God*, he hath no reaſon to deceive himſelf, in giving credit to them; and if there be good Evidence that they are *Divine*, he hath no intereſt or inclination to reject them; for it being his great deſign to *do the Will of God*, he is glad of all opportunities to come to the knowledge of it, that he may do it. Serm. II.

Thus you ſee how a ſincere deſire and endeavour to obey the Will of God, does ſecure Men againſt fatal Errors and Miſtakes in Matters of Religion; becauſe ſuch Perſons are hereby better diſpoſed to make a right Judgment of Divine Things, both becauſe they have truer and ſurer notions of God and Religion, and are more impartial in their ſearch and enquiry after Truth. This is the *firſt* Account.

II. Another Reaſon why they who ſincerely deſire *to do the Will of God*, have a great ſecurity in diſcerning Truth from Error, is, becauſe the Providence of God is more eſpecially con-

cerned to preſerve ſuch Perſons from dangerous Errors and Miſtakes in Things which concern their Eternal Salvation. When Men are of a teachable Temper, God loves to reveal himſelf and his Truth to them; and ſuch is an humble and obedient frame of Mind. *Pſal.* 25. 9. *The meek will he guide in Judgment; the meek will he teach his way.* The proper diſpoſition of a Scholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in Religion we are to learn, is *what is the good and acceptable will of God*, that we may *do* it; for Practice is the end of Knowledge. *If you know theſe things* (ſays our Bleſſed Lord) *happy are ye if ye do them.* It is neceſſary *to know the will of God*; but we are *happy* only in *the doing of it*: and *if any Man be deſirous to do the Will of God*, his Goodneſs is ſuch, that he will take effectual care to ſecure ſuch an one againſt dangerous and fatal Errors. He that hath an honeſt Mind, and *would do the Will of God*, if he know it, God will not ſuffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be miſtaken about it, in any neceſſary Points of Faith, or Practice.

St.

St. *Paul* is a wonderful Inſtance of the Goodneſs of God in this kind. He was undoubtedly a Man of a very honeſt Mind; he had entertained the *Jewiſh* Religion, as revealed by God, and been bred in it; and out of a blind reverence and belief of his Teachers, who rejected Chriſt and his Doctrine, he likewiſe oppoſed and perſecuted them with a mighty Zeal, and an honeſt intention, being *verily perſwaded* (as he himſelf tells us) *that he ought to do* what he did, *againſt the Name of Jeſus of Nazareth*; he was under a great prejudice upon account of his Education, and according to the heat of his natural Temper, tranſported with great Paſſion: But *becauſe he did* what he did, *ignorantly, and in unbelief*; God was pleaſed *to ſhew mercy to him*, and in a miraculous manner to convince him of the Truth of that Religion which he perſecuted. He was ſincerely *deſirous to do the will of God*, and therefore God would rather work a Miracle for his Converſion, than ſuffer him to go Serm. II.

on in ſo fatal a Miſtake concerning the Chriſtian Religion.

And as the Providence of God doth concern it ſelf to ſecure good Men from dangerous Errors and Miſtakes in Matters of Religion; ſo by a juſt Judgment he gives up thoſe who allow themſelves in vicious practices, to Error, and Infidelity. And this is the meaning of that paſſage of the Prophet *Iſa. Ch.* 6. 10. ſo often cited by our Saviour, and applied to the *Jews*, of *making the heart of that People fat, and their Ears heavy, and cloſing their Eyes, leſt they ſhould Underſtand, and be Converted.* So again, *Iſa.* 66. 3, 4. God threatens the People of *Iſrael*, That becauſe they were wicked and abominable in their Lives, he would abandon them, and give them over to a Spirit of Deluſion; *they have choſen their own ways, and their Soul delighteth in their Abominations; I alſo will chuſe their deluſions.* God is ſaid to chuſe thoſe things for us, which he permits us to fall into: So *Rom.* 1. 28. God is ſaid to *give over* the abominable Heathen to *a Reprobate Mind.*

Mind. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over εἰς ἀδόκιμον νοῦν, *to an Injudicious and Undiſcerning Mind.* When Men abandon themſelves to Wickedneſs and Impiety, God withdraws his Grace from them; and by his ſecret and juſt Judgment they are deprived of the Faculty of diſcerning between Truth and Error, between Good and Evil. 2 *Theſſ.* 2. 10, 11, 12. It is ſaid, that *the Man of Sin ſhould come with all deceiveableneſs of Unrighteouſneſs in them that periſh, becauſe they received not the love of the Truth, that they might be Saved:* And that *for this Cauſe, God would ſend them ſtrong deluſion, that they ſhould believe a Lye; that they all might be Damned, who believed not the Truth, but had pleaſure in Unrighteouſneſs.* And it is juſt with God, that Men of Vicious Inclinations and Practices ſhould be expoſed to the Cheat of the groſſeſt and vileſt Impoſtors. God's Providence is concerned for Men of honeſt Minds, and ſincere Intentions: But if Men *take pleaſure in Unrighteouſneſs*, God takes no further care of them, but *delivers them up to their own hearts Luſts*, to be ſeduced

Serm. II.

ced into all those Errors, into which their own *vain Imaginations*, and their *foolish hearts* are apt to lead them.

Thus have I endeavoured, as briefly as I could, to shew that an honest Mind, that *sincerely desires and endeavours to do the Will of God*, is the best security against fatal Errors and mistakes in Matters of Religion; both because it disposeth a Man to make a true Judgment of Divine Things, and because the Providence of God is more especially concerned for the security of such Persons.

There remains an *Objection* to be answered, to which this Discourse may seem liable; but *this*, together with the *Inferences* which may be made from this Discourse, I shall referr to another opportunity.

SERM-

SERMON III.

Honesty the best Preservative against dangerous mistakes in Religion.

The Second Sermon on

JOHN VII. 17.

If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.

I Made entrance into these words the last Day; in which our Saviour declares to us, that an honest and sincere Mind, and an hearty Desire and Endeavour to do the Will of God, is the best Security and Preservative against dangerous Errors and Mistakes in Matters of Religion; ἐάν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν, *if any Man desire to do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine,*

whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of my ſelf.

Now there are (I told you) *Two* great Miſtakes in Religion: *To reject any thing which really is from God*; and *to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which is not really from him.* And therefore I propoſed from this *Text* to ſhew how a ſincere Deſire and Endeavour to do the Will of God, is a ſecurity to Men againſt both theſe Dangers, namely, upon theſe *Two* Accounts.

Firſt, Becauſe he who ſincerely Deſires and Endeavours to do the Will of God, is hereby better qualified and diſpoſed to make a right Judgment of Spiritual and Divine Things; and that for theſe *Two* Reaſons.

I. Becauſe ſuch a Perſon hath a truer Notion of God, and Divine Things. He that reſembleth God moſt, is like to underſtand him beſt, becauſe he finds thoſe Perfections in ſome meaſure in himſelf, which he Contemplates in the Divine Nature; and

and nothing gives a Man ſo ſure a Notion of Things, as Practice, and Experience. Serm. III.

II. Becauſe ſuch a perſon is more Impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after Truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to diſcern it from Error. That Man only ſtands fair for the entertainment of Truth, who is under the Power and Dominion of no Vice, or Luſt, becauſe he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to ſeduce him and draw him aſide in his enquiry after Truth: He hath no manner of concernment that the contrary Propoſition ſhould be true, having the indifferency of a Traveller, and no other Intereſt, but to find out the right way to Heaven, and to walk in it. But if a Man be biaſs'd by any Luſt, and addicted to any vicious Practice, he is then an intereſted Perſon and concern'd to make a partial Judgment of Things, and is under a great Temptation to Infidelity, when the Truths of God are propoſed to him; becauſe whatever the Evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling

ling to own the Truths of thoſe Doctrines, which are ſo contrary to his inclination and intereſt.

Secondly, Another Reaſon why they who ſincerely deſire to do the Will of God, have a greater ſecurity in diſcerning Truth from Error, is, becauſe the Providence of God is more eſpecially concern'd to preſerve ſuch Perſons from dangerous Errors and Miſtakes, in Things which concern their Eternal Salvation. When Men are of a teachable Temper, of an humble and obedient frame of Mind, God loves to reveal himſelf, and his Truth to them. *Pſal.* 25. 9. *The meek will he guide in Judgment, and the Meek will he teach his way.* The proper Diſpoſition of a Scholar, is to be willing to Learn; and that which in Religion we are to Learn, is, *what is the good and acceptable Will of God, that we may do it*; for Practice is the end of Knowledge; *If ye know theſe things* (ſaith our Saviour) *happy are ye if ye do them.* It is neceſſary *to know the Will of God*; but we are only *happy in the doing of it*; and *if any Man be deſirous to do the Will of*

of God, his Goodneſs is ſuch, that he will take effectual care to ſecure ſuch a one againſt dangerous and fatal Errors. He that hath an honeſt Mind, and would do the Will of God, if he knew it, God will not ſuffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be miſtaken about it, in any neceſſary Point of Faith, or Practice. Thus far I have gone. Serm. III.

I ſhall now proceed to remove an *Objection*, to which this Diſcourſe may ſeem liable, and then draw ſome *Inferences* from the whole.

After all that hath been ſaid, ſome perhaps may ask, Is every good Man then ſecure from all Error and Miſtake in Matters of Religion? This is a mighty Priviledge indeed: But do not we find the contrary in Experience? That an honeſt Heart, and a weak Head, do often meet together?

For anſwer to this, I ſhall lay down theſe following *Propoſitions*.

Firſt,

First, That if there were any necessity, that a good Man should be secured from all manner of Error and Mistake in Religion, this Probity of Mind and sincere desire to do the Will of God, is the best way to do it; because such a Temper and Disposition of Mind gives a Man the best advantages to discern betwixt Truth, and Error; and God is most likely to reveal his Will to such Persons. But there is no necessity of this; because a Man may be a good Man, and go to Heaven, notwithstanding a great many Mistakes in Religion about things not necessary. For while we are in this imperfect State, *we know but in part*, and see many Things very imperfectly: But when we shall come into a more perfect State, *that which is imperfect shall be done away*; the light of Glory shall scatter all those Mists and Clouds, which are now upon our Understandings, and hinder us from a clear Sight and Judgment of Things; we shall then see God, and other Things, as they are; and be freed from all that Ignorance, and those many Childish Mistakes

Miſtakes, which we are liable to here below; and till then, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould be ſecured from them. Humility under a ſenſe of our Ignorance is better for us, than Infallibility would be. Serm. III.

Secondly, This Temper and Diſpoſition of Mind which I have been ſpeaking of, is a certain ſecurity againſt Fatal Miſtakes in Religion, and a final continuance in ſuch Errors as would prove Damnable; and this is all that this Diſcourſe pretends to, or our Saviour hath promiſed in this *Text*. And conſidering the Goodneſs of God, nothing is more improbable, than that an honeſt Mind that ſeeks impartially after Truth, ſhould miſs of it; in Things that are Fundamentally neceſſary to Salvation. And if we could ſuppoſe ſuch a Man to fall into ſuch an Error, either it would not be Fundamental to *him*, having not been perhaps propoſed to him with ſufficient Evidence, and would be forgiven him upon a general Repentance for all Sins and Errors known, or unknown; or he would not be permitted

to

to continue in it; but the Providence of God would find out ſome way or other to convince him of his Error, and to bring him *to the acknowledgment of the Truth, that he might be ſaved.* God would rather ſpeak to him immediately from Heaven (as he did to St. *Paul*) than ſuffer him to continue in ſuch an Error, as would infallibly carry him to Hell.

Thirdly, There is no ſuch depth of Judgment, and ſubtilty of Wit required, to diſcern between groſs and Damnable Errors in Religion, and Neceſſary and Saving Truth, but that an ordinary Capacity may be able to do it. There is ſo plain a Line drawn between great Truth, and groſs Errors, that it is viſible to every Capacity; and an ordinary Underſtanding, that is not under a violent Prejudice, or blinded by ſome Vice or Fault of the Will, may eaſily diſcern it. Indeed, in Matters of leſſer Moment and Concernment, and which have no ſuch conſiderable and immediate Influence upon the practice of an Holy Life, the difference betwixt Truth and Error

is not always ſo groſs, and ſenſible, as to be obvious to every unprejudiced Eye. But we have all the Reaſon in the World to believe, that the Goodneſs and Juſtice of God is ſuch, as to make nothing neceſſary to be believed by any Man, which by the help of due Inſtruction may not be made ſufficiently plain to a common Underſtanding, God hath ſo tender a Care of good Men, who ſincerely love him and his Truth, that we may reaſonably preſume, that he will not leave them under an unavoidable Miſtake, concerning thoſe Matters upon which their Eternal Salvation does depend. *The Judge of all the World will do right*; and then we may certainly conclude, that he will not Condemn any Man for no Fault, and make him for ever miſerable, for falling into an Error, which with all his Care and Diligence he could not poſſible either deſcern, or avoid. Serm. III.

Fourthly, God hath made abundant Proviſion for our ſecurity from Fatal and Dangerous Errors in Religion, by theſe *three* ways.

I.

Vol. III. I. By an an *Infallible Rule*, ſufficiently plain in all Things neceſſary.

II. By ſufficient means of Inſtruction, to help us to underſtand this Rule.

III. By an *Infallible Promiſe* of Security from Dangerous Errors and Miſtakes, if with an honeſt Mind, and due Diligence we will apply our ſelves to underſtand this Rule, and make uſe of the Means of Inſtruction, which God hath provided for that purpoſe.

I. God hath given us an *Infallible Rule*, ſufficiently plain in all things neceſſary. He hath given us the Holy Scriptures, which were given at firſt by Divine Inſpiration, *i. e.* by Men Infallibly aſſiſted in the Writing of them, and therefore muſt needs be an *Infallible Rule*; and *all Scripture Divinely Inſpired, is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs*, as St. *Paul* tells us, 2 *Tim.* 3. 16. ſpeaking there of the Books of the *Old Teſtament*; and there is

is the ſame Reaſon as to the Inſpired Writings of the *New.* Serm. III.

Now if the Scriptures be an *Infallible Rule*, and *profitable for Doctrine and Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs*, *i. e.* to teach us to believe, and do; it follows of neceſſity, that they are ſufficiently plain in all Things neceſſary to Faith, and a good Life; otherwiſe they could not be *uſeful for Doctrine and Inſtruction in Righteouſneſs*; for a Rule that is not plain to us in theſe Things, in which it is neceſſary for us to be Directed by it, is of no uſe to us; that is in truth, it is no Rule. For a Rule muſt have theſe two Properties; it muſt be *Perfect*, and it muſt be *Plain*. The Scriptures are a perfect Rule, becauſe the Writers of them being Divinely Inſpired, were Infallible: And they muſt likewiſe be Plain; otherwiſe, tho' they be never ſo Perfect, they can be of no more uſe to direct our Faith and Practice, than a Sun-Dial in a dark Room is, to tell us the Hour of the Day. For tho' it be never ſo exactly made, unleſs the Sun ſhine clearly upon it, we had as good be-

Vol. III. without it. A Rule that is not plain to us, whatever it may be in *it ſelf*, is of no uſe at all to *us*, till it be made plain, and we underſtand it.

II. God hath likewiſe provided ſufficient means of Inſtruction to help us to underſtand this Rule. It is not neceſſary that a Rule ſhould be ſo plain, that we ſhould perfectly underſtand it at firſt ſight; it is ſufficient, if it be ſo plain, that thoſe of better Capacity and Underſtanding may, with due diligence and application of Mind, come to the true Knowledge of it; and thoſe of a lower and more ordinary Capacity, by the Help and Inſtruction of a Teacher. *Euclid*'s *Elements* is a Book ſufficiently plain to Teach a Man *Geometry*; but yet not ſo plain that any Man at firſt Reading ſhould underſtand it perfectly; but that by diligent Reading, by a due Application, and ſteady Attention of Mind, a Man of extraordinary Sagacity and Underſtanding may come to underſtand the *Principles* and *Demonſtrations* of it, and thoſe of a more ordinary Capacity, with

with the help of a Teacher, may come to the Knowledge of it. So when we say that the Scriptures are plain in all Things necessary to Faith, and a good Life, we do not mean that every Man at first Hearing or Reading of these Things in it, shall perfectly understand them; but by diligent Reading and Consideration, if he be of good Apprehension and Capacity, he may come to a sufficient Knowledge of them; and if he be of a meaner Capacity, and be willing to Learn, he may by the help of a Teacher, be brought to understand them without any great pains; and such Teachers God hath appointed in his Church for this very purpose, and a Succession of them to continue to the end of the World. Serm. III.

In a word, when we say the Scriptures are plain to all Capacities, in all Things necessary, we mean, that any Man of ordinary Capacity, by his own Diligence and Care, in Conjunction with the Helps and Advantages which God hath appointed, and in the due Use of them, may attain to the

Knowledge of every Thing neceſſary to his Salvation; and that there is no Book in the World more plain, and better fitted to Teach a Man any *Art* or *Science*, than the *Bible* is to Direct and Inſtruct Men in *the Way to Heaven*; and it is every Man's fault if he be ignorant of any Thing neceſſary for him to believe, or do, in order to his Eternal Happineſs.

III. Good Men are likewiſe ſecured from Fatal Errors in Religion, by the *Infallible* Promiſe of God, if ſo be that with honeſt Minds and due Diligence they apply themſelves to the underſtanding of this Rule, and make uſe of the Means of Inſtruction which God hath provided for that purpoſe. God hath promiſed *to Guide and Teach the Humble and Meek*; that is, ſuch as are of a Submiſſive and Teachable Temper, deſirous and diligent to be Inſtructed in the Truth, *Prov.* 2. 2, 3, 4, 5. *If thou incline thine Ear to Wiſdom, and apply thine Heart to Underſtanding; yea, if thou cryeſt after Knowledge, and lifteſt up thy Voice for Underſtanding, if thou ſeekeſt her as Silver,*

Silver, and ſearcheſt for her, as for hid Treaſures; then ſhalt thou underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God. And here in the *Text* our Saviour aſſures us, that *If any Man be deſirous to do his Will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God or whether he ſpake of himſelf*; *i. e.* he ſhall be able to diſcern the Doctrines which are from God. Serm. III.

This is the Proviſion which God hath made for our ſecurity from Fatal Miſtakes in Religion; and this is in all Reſpects a better Security, and more likely to Guide and Conduct us ſafely to Heaven, than any *Infallible Church*, and that for theſe Reaſons.

Firſt, Becauſe it is much more certain that God hath made this Proviſion which I have mentioned, than that there is *an Infallible Church* appointed and aſſiſted by him to this Purpoſe. That the Scriptures are *an Infallible and Adequate Rule*, and ſufficiently plain in all Things neceſſary, I have already proved; and I add

Vol. III. further, that this was the constant Judgment of the Ancient Church, and so declared by the Unanimous Consent of the Fathers of it for many Ages; and that all *Councils* in their Determination of Faith, proceeded upon this Rule, till the Second *Council* of *Nice*.

I have likewise proved, That God hath provided a Succession of Pastors and Teachers in his Church, to Instruct us in this Rule; and that we have God's Infallible Promise for our security from dangerous Errors and Mistakes, if with an honest Mind and due Diligence we apply our selves to understand this Rule, and make use of the Means of Instruction which God hath provided for that Purpose.

But that there is *an Infallible Church* Appointed and Assisted by God, to Declare and Determine Matters of Faith, and to be an Infallible Interpreter of Scripture, is not certain, because there is no clear and express Text of Scripture to that purpose, that any Church whatsoever, much less that the *Church of*

of Rome hath this Power and Priviledge. Serm. III.

Nay, I add further, That it is Impoſſible, according to the Principles of the *Church of Rome*, that this ſhould be proved from Scripture; becauſe, according to their Principles, we cannot know either which are the true Books of Scripture, or what is the true Senſe of Scripture, but from the Authority and Infallible Declaration of that Church. And if ſo, then the Infallibility of the Church muſt be firſt known, and proved, before we can either know the Scriptures, or the Senſe of them; and yet 'till we know the Scriptures, and the Senſe of them, nothing can be proved by them. Now to pretend to prove the Infallibility of their Church by Scripture, and at the ſame time to declare, that which are the true Books of Scripture, and what is the true Senſe of them, can only be proved by the Infallible Authority of their Church, is a plain and ſhameful *Circle*, out of which there is no way of eſcape; and conſequently that God hath appointed *an Infallible Church* is

Vol. III. Impoſſible, according to their Principles, ever to be proved from Scripture, and the Thing is capable of no other Proof. For that God will Infallibly Aſſiſt any Society of Men, is not to be known, but by Divine Revelation. So that unleſs they can prove it by ſome other Revelation than that of Scripture (which they do not pretend to) the Thing is not to be proved at all. Yes, they ſay, by the *Notes* and *Marks* of the *True Church*; but what thoſe *Marks* are, muſt either be known from Scripture, or ſome other Divine Revelation, and then the ſame Difficulty returns; beſides that one of the moſt Eſſential *Marks* of *the true Church* muſt be *the Profeſſion of the true Faith*; and then it muſt firſt be known which is *the True Faith*, before we can know which is *the True Church*; and yet they ſay, That no Man can learn *the True Faith*, but from *the True Church*; and this runs them unavoidably into another *Circle* as ſhameful as the other. So that which way ſoever they go to prove *an Infallible Church*, they are ſhut up in a plain *Circle*, and muſt either prove *the Scriptures* by *the Church* and

and *the Church* by *the Scriptures*; or *the True Church* by *the True Faith*, and *the True Faith* by *the True Church.* Serm. III.

Secondly, This Proviſion and Security which I have mentioned, is more Humane, better Accommodated and Suited to the Nature of Man; becauſe it doth not ſuppoſe and need a ſtanding and perpetual Miracle as the other way of *an Infallible Church* doth. All Inſpiration is Supernatural and Miraculous, and this Infallible Aſſiſtance which the *Church of Rome* claims to her ſelf, muſt either be ſuch as the Apoſtles had, which was by immediate Inſpiration, or ſomething equal to it, and alike Supernatural: But God does not work Miracles without need, or continue them when there is no occaſion for them. When God delivered the *Law* to the People of *Iſrael*, it was accompanied with Miracles, and the Prophets which he ſent to them from time to time, had an immediate Inſpiration; but their *Supream Judicature*, or their *General Council*, which they call the *Sanhedrim*, was not Infallibly aſſiſted in the Expounding

ing of the *Law*, when Doubts and Difficulties arose about it; no, nor in judging of True and False Prophets; but they determined this, and all other Emergent Causes, by the standing Revelation and Rule of their *Written Law*; and that they were not Infallibly Assisted, is evident from the great Errors they fell into, in *making void the Commandments of God by their Traditions*, and in their Rejecting and Crucifying the true *Messias*, and the *Son of God*.

In like manner the Apostles and first Teachers of the Christian Religion, were immediately Inspired, and Miracuously Assisted in the Publishing of the Christian Doctrine, and for the speedy and more effectual Propagating and Planting of it in the World, in despite of the violent Prejudices that were against it, and the fierce opposition that was made to it. But when this was done, this Miraculous and Extraordinary Assistance ceased, and God left the Christian Religion to be preserved and continued by more Humane and Ordinary ways, the Doctrines

ctrines of it, being committed to *Writing* for *a ſtanding Rule* of Faith and Practice in all Ages, and an *Order* of Men appointed to Inſtruct People in thoſe Doctrines, with a Promiſe to ſecure both Teachers and People, that ſincerely deſire to know, and do the Will of God, from all Fatal Errors and Miſtakes about Things neceſſary to their Eternal Salvation; and this is a Proviſion more likely to be made by God, and better ſuited to the Nature of Man, than the perpetual and needleſs Miracle of an Inſpired, or any otherwiſe *Infallible Church.* Serm. III.

Thirdly, This way is likewiſe more agreeable to the Nature of Religion, and the Virtue of Faith. The Deſign of *an Infallible Church* is to ſecure all that continue in the Communion of it, againſt all poſſibility of Error in Matters of Faith. The Queſtion now is not, Whether *an Infallible Church* would do this? but whether that Church which arrogates *Infalliblity* to it ſelf, does not pretend to do this? And if they could do it, it would not be agreeable to the Nature of Religion, and the

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the Virtue of Faith. For Faith, which is the Principle of all Religious Actions, would be no Virtue, if it were neceſſary. A true and right Belief can be no Virtue, where a Man is *Infallibly* ſecured againſt Error. There is the ſame Reaſon of Virtuous and Criminal Actions; and as there can be no Crime or Fault in doing what a Man cannot help; ſo neither can there be any Virtue. All Virtuous Actions are Matter of Praiſe and Commendation, and therefore it can be no Virtue in any Man; becauſe it deſerves no Commendation, to believe and own that the Sun ſhines at Noon-day, when he ſees it does ſo. No more would it be a Virtue in any Man, and deſerve Praiſe, to Believe aright, who is in a Church wherein he is *Infallibly* ſecured againſt all Error in Matters of Faith. Make any thing neceſſary, and impoſſible to be otherwiſe, and the doing of it ceaſes to be a Virtue. God hath ſo framed Religion, and the Evidence of Truth, and the Means of coming to the Knowledge of it, as to be a ſufficient Security to Men of honeſt Minds and teachable Tempers, againſt all Fatal

Fatal and Final Miſtakes concerning Things neceſſary to Salvation; but not ſo, that every Man that is of *ſuch a Church*, ſhould be *Infallibly* ſecured againſt all Errors in Matters of Faith; and this on purpoſe to try the Virtue and Diſpoſition of Men, whether they will be at the pains to ſearch for Truth, and when it is propoſed to them with ſufficient Evidence, tho' not by an *Infallible* Hand, they will *receive it in the love of it, that they may be Saved.* Serm. III.

Fourthly, This is as much ſecurity againſt Error in Matters of Faith, as God hath provided againſt Sin and Vice in Matters of Practice; and ſince a right Belief is only in order to a good Life, a Man would be hard put to it, to give a wiſe Reaſon, why God ſhould take greater Care for the *Infallible* Security of Mens Faith, than of their Obedience. The Reaſon pretended why God ſhould make ſuch *Infallible* Proviſion for a right Faith, is, for the better ſecurity of Mens Eternal Salvation, and Happineſs. Now the Virtues of a good Life, have a more Direct

rect and Immediate Influence upon *that*, than the moſt Orthodox Belief. *The end of the Commandments*, (*i. e.*) of the Declaration of the Goſpel *is Charity*. In the Chriſtian Religion that which mainly avails to our Juſtification and Salvation is, *a Faith that worketh by Charity*, and *the keeping of the Commandments of God*. *He that heareth theſe Sayings of mine, and doth them* (ſaith our Bleſſed Lord) *I will liken him to a Wiſe Man that Built his Houſe upon a Rock*; and again, *not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord*, (*i. e.*) makes Profeſſion of Faith in me, *ſhall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; *but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven*; and again, *if ye know theſe Things, happy are ye, if ye do them*. And the Apoſtle St. *Peter* Exhorts Chriſtians to *add to their Faith and Knowledge, Virtue, and Godlineſs, and Brotherly Kindneſs, and Charity, that ſo an abundant entrance may be miniſtred to them, into the Everlaſting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*. So that the Virtues of a good Life have the greateſt Influence upon our Salvation, and the main ſtreſs of Chriſtianity is to be laid

laid there. And therefore whatever Reaſon can be aſſigned, why God ſhould provide for the *Infallible* ſecurity of our Faith, is much ſtronger, why an equal Proviſion ſhould be made to ſecure Holineſs, and Obedience of Life; becauſe without *this*, Faith cannot *Infallibly* attain its *End*, which is *the Salvation of our Souls*. But *this* it is granted God hath not done, and Experience ſhews it; and therefore it is unreaſonable to ſuppoſe that he hath done the other. It is ſufficient, that in both kinds he hath done that which is ſufficient to make us capable of Happineſs, if we be not wanting to our ſelves; the reſt he hath left to the ſincerity of our Endeavours; expecting that we on our part, ſhould *work out our Salvation with fear and trembling*, and *give all Diligence to make our Calling and Election ſure*. And if God hath made ſuch Proviſion by the Goſpel, for all that enjoy the Light and Advantage of it, that none can miſcarry without their own fault; then both his Goodneſs and Wiſdom are ſufficiently acquitted, without an *Infallible Guide and Judge* in Matters of Faith; and that Irreverent way of Arguing in the *Canon Law*, might well have

Serm. III.

Vol. III. have been ſpared; that of neceſſity there muſt be *an Infallible Judge of* Controverſies in Religion; *aliter Dominus non videretur fuiſſe diſcretus, otherwiſe God would not ſeem to have Ordered Matters diſcreetly.*

But what *Infallible* Security ſoever they have in the *Church of Rome*, as to Matters of Faith, they are certainly the worſt provided of wholſom and ſafe Directions for the Conſciences and Lives of Men, of any Church in the World. No Religion that I know of in the World, ever had ſuch Lewd and Scandalous Caſuiſts. Witneſs the Moral Divinity of the *Jeſuits*, which hath been ſo expoſed to the World, not only by thoſe of *our* Religion, but by their own Writers alſo. Nor is this Miſchief only confined to *that Order*; their Caſuiſts in general, and even the more Ancient of them, who writ before the *Order* of *Jeſuits* appeared in the World, have given ſuch a Liberty, and looſe, to great Immorality in ſeveral kinds, as is infinitely to the reproach of the beſt and pureſt Religion in the World. Inſomuch that Sir *Tho. Moor* himſelf, who

was

was a great Zealot for that Religion, could not forbear to make a loud Complaint of it, and to paſs this ſevere Cenſure upon the generality of their Caſuiſts: "That their great Buſineſs ſeem'd "to be, not to keep Men from Sin, but "to Teach them *quàm propè ad peccatum* "*liceat accedere ſine peccato*; how near "to Sin they might lawfully come "without Sinning. In the mean time the Conſciences of Men are like to be well directed, when inſtead of giving Men plain Rules for the Government of their Hearts and Lives, and clear Reſolutions of the Material Doubts which frequently occur in Humane Life, they entangle them in Niceties, and endleſs Scrupuloſities, teaching them to ſplit Hairs in Divinity, and how with great Art and Cunning they may avoid the committing of any Sin, and yet come as near to it as is poſſible. This is a thing of a moſt dangerous Conſequence to the Souls of Men; and if Men be but once encouraged to paſs to the utmoſt Bounds of what is Lawful, the next ſtep will be into that which is Unlawful. Serm. III.

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So that unless *Faith without Works will save Men*, notwithstanding the *Infallible* Security which they pretend to give Men of a sound and right Belief (if it were really as much as they talk of) the Salvation of Men would still be in great hazard and uncertainty, for want of better and safer Directions for a good Life, than are ordinarily to be met with in the Casuistical Writings of that Church; especially if we consider that the Scriptures are lock'd up from the People in an unknown Tongue, where the surest and plainest Directions for a good Life are most plentifully to be had; insomuch, that a Man had better want all the Volumes of Casuistical Divinity, that ever were written in the World, than to be without the *Bible*; by the diligent studying of which Book alone, he may sooner learn the way to Heaven, than by all the Books in the World without it.

Fifthly, and *Lastly*, This Provision which God hath made, is, when all is done, as good a Security against Fatal Errors and Mistakes in Religion, as *an Infallible Church* could give, if there were one,

one; and it is as good a way to prevent and put an end to Controverſies in Religion, ſo far as it is neceſſary that they ſhould be prevented, and have an end put to them: And theſe are the *two* great Reaſons why *an Infallible Judge* is ſo importunately demanded, and inſiſted upon. I ſhall ſpeak to *theſe* diſtinctly, and ſeverally; but becauſe they will require a longer Diſcourſe than the time will allow, I ſhall not enter upon them at preſent, but refer them to another Opportunity. Serm. III.

SERMON IV.

Honeſty the beſt Preſervative againſt dangerous miſtakes in Religion.

The Third Sermon on

JOHN VII. 17.

If any Man will do his Will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of my ſelf.

WHEN I made entrance into theſe Words, I propoſed from this *Text*,

Firſt, To ſhew that an honeſt and ſincere Mind, and a hearty Deſire and Endeavour to do the Will of God, is the greateſt Security and beſt Preſervative againſt dangerous Errors and Miſtakes in Matters of Religion.

In the next place, I proceeded to remove an *Objection*, to which my Diſcourſe upon this Subject might ſeem liable. Some perhaps might ask, Is every good Man then ſecure from all Error and Miſtake in Matters of Religion? This is a mighty Privilege indeed. But do we not find the contrary in experience, that an honeſt Heart, and a weak Head do often meet together? For Anſwer to this, I laid down ſeveral *Propoſitions*.

By the *Laſt* of which I ſhew'd, that God hath made abundant Proviſion for our Security from fatal and dangerous Errors in Religion, both by *the Infallible Rule* of the Holy Scripture, and by ſufficient *means of Inſtruction* to help us to underſtand this Rule, and by his *Infallible Promiſe of aſſiſting us*, if with honeſt Minds, and a due Diligence we apply our ſelves to the underſtanding of this Rule, and the uſe of theſe Means. And *this*, I told you, was in all Reſpects a better Security, and more likely to Conduct us ſafe to Heaven, than any *Infallible Church* whatſoever; and

and that for *Five* Reaſons; *Four* of which I have already treated of, and now proceed to the *Fifth*, and laſt, *viz.* Serm. IV.

Becauſe this Proviſion which I have ſhewen God hath made, is both as good a ſecurity againſt Fatal Errors and Miſtakes in Religion, as an *Infallible Church* could give, if there were *One*: And it is likewiſe as good a way to prevent and put an end to Controverſies in Religion, ſo far as it is neceſſary they ſhould be prevented, or have an end put to them. And theſe are the *Two* great Reaſons why *an Infallible Judge* is ſo importunately demanded, and inſiſted upon. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe *Two* Points, diſtinctly, and ſeverally.

Firſt, Becauſe this is as good a ſecurity againſt Fatal Errors and Miſtakes in Religion, as *an Infallible Church* could give if there were *one*. For an *Infallible Church*, if there were ſuch an one upon Earth, could not *Infallibly* ſecure particular Chriſtians againſt Errors in Faith, any other way, than by

Vol. III. the Definition and Declaration of those who are *Infallible* in that Church. And there are but *three* that pretend to it; either the Pope, or a Council General, or the Pope and a General Council agreeing in the same Definitions. Not the Pope by himself, nor the General Council without the Pope; because the Church which pretends to *Infallibility*, is not agreed, that either of these alone is *Infallible*, and therefore their Definitions can be no certain, much less *Infallible* Foundation of Faith; no, not to that Church which pretends to *Infallibility*. So that if there be an *Infallible Oracle* in that Church, it must be the Pope and Council in Conjunction, or the Definition of a Council confirmed by the Pope. Now in that Case, either the Council was *Infallible* in its Definitions, before they had the Pope's Confirmation, or not. If the Council was *Infallible* in its Definitions, before they had the Pope's Confirmation; then the Council alone and of its self was *Infallible* (which a great part of the Church of *Rome* deny) and then it needed not the Pope's Confirmation to make it *Infallible*: Or else

a

a General Council is not *Infallible* in its Definitions, before they receive the Pope's Confirmation; and then the Pope's Confirmation cannot make it ſo: For that which was not *Infallibly* Defined by the Council, cannot be made *Infallible* by the Pope's Confirmation. Serm. IV.

But there is another Difficulty yet: It is a Maxim generally receiv'd, and that even in the *Roman Church*, "That "the Definitions of a General Council, "confirmed by the Pope, are not Obli- "gatory, unleſs they be receiv'd by the "Univerſal Church. From whence theſe *two* great Inconveniencies will unavoidably follow.

I. That no Man is obliged to believe ſuch Definitions, 'till he Certainly know that they are received by the Univerſal Church; which how he ſhould Certainly, much leſs Infallibly know, I cannot underſtand; unleſs he either ſpeak with all the Chriſtians in the World, or the Repreſentatives of all particular Churches return back and meet again in Council, to declare that the

the Universal Church hath received their Definitions; which I think was never yet done.

II. It will follow, that the Definitions of a General Council, confirmed by the Pope, are not *Infallible*, 'till they be received by the Universal Church. For if they were *Infallible* without that, they would be Obligatory without it; because an *Infallible* Definition, if we know it to be so, lays an Obligation to believe it, whether it be receiv'd by the Universal Church, or not. And if such Definitions are not *Infallible* 'till they be received by the Universal Church, they cannot become *Infallible* afterwards; because if the Definitions were not *Infallible* before, they cannot be received as such by the Universal Church, nor by the meer reception of them, be made to be *Infallible* Definitions, if they were not so before.

But if we should pass over all these Difficulties, there is a greater yet behind, and that is, Supposing the Definitions of General Councils confirmed by

by the Pope to be *Infallible*, particular Christians cannot be secured *Infallibly* from Error without the Knowledge of those Definitions. And there are but *Two* ways imaginable of conveying this Knowledge to them: Either by the living voice of their particular Pastors, whom they are implicitely to believe in these Matters; but particular Pastors are *Fallible* (as they themselves grant) and therefore their words can neither be an *Infallible* Foundation of Faith, or an *Infallible* means of conveying it; and it is unreasonable, *they* say, for Men that own themselves to be *Fallible*, to require an implicit Belief to be given to them: Or else the Knowledge of the Definitions of Councils must be conveyed to particular Christians by Writing; and if so, then there will only be *an Infallible Rule*, but no living *Infallible Judge*. And if an *Infallible Rule* will serve the turn, we have the Scriptures, which we are sure are *Infallible*, and therefore at least as good as any other *Rule*. But they say, that the Definitions of Councils give us an *Infallible* Interpretation of Scripture, and therefore Serm. IV.

fore are of greater advantage to us. But do not the Definitions of Councils sometimes also need Explication, that we may know the certain Sense of them, without which we cannot know the Doctrines defined? Yes certainly, they need Explication as much as Scripture, if there be any difference about the meaning of them; and there have been, and still are great Differences among those of their own Church about the meaning of them. And if the Explications of General Councils need themselves to be explained, then there is nothing got by them, and we are but where we were before: For Differences about the meaning of the Definitions of General Councils, make as great Difficulties and Uncertainties in Faith, as the Differences about the meaning of Scripture.

Well, but the People have the living voice of their particular Pastors to explain the Definitions of Councils to them. But this does not help the Matter neither, for these *two* Reasons.

1. Be-

Serm. IV.

1. Becauſe particular Paſtors have no Authority to explain the Difinitions of General Councils. The Council of *Trent* hath by expreſs Decree, reſerved to the Pope, and to him only, the Power to explain the Definitions of the Council, if any difference ariſe about the meaning of them. So that if there be any difference about the true ſenſe and meaning of any of the Definitions of the Council, particular Paſtors have no Authority to explain them; and where there is no doubt or difference about the meaning of them, there is no occaſion for the explication of them.

2. But ſuppoſe they had Authority to explain them, this can be no *Infallible* Security to the People that they explain them right; both becauſe particular Paſtors are *Fallible*; and likewiſe becauſe we ſee in experience, that they differ in their Explications; witneſs the Biſhop of *Condom*'s *Expoſition* of the Catholick Faith, and of the Definitions of the Council of *Trent*, which is in many Material Points

Points very different from that of *Bellarmine*, and many other Famous Doctors of that Church. And which is more, witness the many differences betwixt *Ambrosius Catharinus*, and *Dominicus Asoto*, about the Definitions of that Council, in which they were both present, and heard the Debates, and themselves bore a great part in them. Now if they who were present at the framing of the Definitions of that Council, cannot agree about the meaning of them, much less can it be expected from those that were absent.

Secondly, This Provision which I have mentioned, is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to Controversies in Religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them, as any *Infallible Church* would be, if there were one: And this is another Reason why *an Infallible Church* is so much insisted upon, that there may be some way and means for a final decision of Controversies, which the Scriptures cannot be, because they are only

only *a dead Rule*, which can end no Controverſie without *a Living Judge* ready at hand, to interpret and apply that Rule upon emergent Occaſions. Serm. IV.

It is not neceſſary that all Controverſies in Religion ſhould either be prevented, or decided: This the Church which pretends to be *Infallicle*, cannot pretend to have done; becauſe there are manifold Controverſies, even in the Church of *Rome* her ſelf, concerning Matters of Religion, which ſtill remain undecided; and in their Commentaries upon Scripture, many Differences about the Senſe of ſeveral Texts, concerning which ſhe hath not thought fit to give an *Infallible* Interpretation. And where their Popes, and ſeveral of their General Councils have thought fit to meddle with Scripture, they have applyed and interpreted Texts more improperly and abſurdly, than even their private Doctors. And which is more, in Differences about Points of Faith, which are pretended on both ſides to be fundamental, this Church hath not thought fit to put an end to them by her Infallible Deciſion,

cision, after two hundred years brangling about them. For instance, in that fierce and long Difference about *the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin*, which on both sides is pretended to be and *Article of Faith*, and for which, contrary Revelations of their Canonized Saints are so frequently pretended; and yet neither Pope, nor General Council, have thought fit to exert their *Infallibility* for the decision of this Controversie. So that if their Church had this Talent of *Infallibility* ever committed to them, they have with *the slothful Servant, laid it up in a Napkin*; and according to our Saviour's Rule, have long since forfeited it, for not making use of it.

And whereas it is pretended, that the Scripture is but *a dead Rule*, which can end no Controversies without a *Living Judge* ready at hand, to interpret and apply that Rule upon emergent Occasions; the same Objection lies against *them*, unless a General Council, which is *their Living Judge* were always sitting. For the Definitions

tions of their Councils in Writing are liable to the ſame, and greater Objections, than the Written Rule of the Scriptures. Serm. IV.

The Summ of all is this. In Differences about leſſer Matters, mutual Charity and Forbearance will ſecure the Peace of the Church, tho' the Differences remain undecided; and in greater Matters, an *Infallible Rule* ſearched into with an honeſt Mind, and due Diligence, and with the help of good Inſtruction, is more likely to extinguiſh and put an end to ſuch Differences, than any *Infallible Judge*, if there were one; becauſe an humble and honeſt Mind is more likely to yield to Reaſon, then a perverſe and cavilling Temper is to ſubmit to the Sentence of an *Infallible Judge*, unleſs it were back'd with an *Inquiſition*. The Church of *Rome* ſuppoſeth her ſelf *Infallible*, and yet notwithſtanding that, ſhe finds that ſome queſtion and deny her *Infallibility*, and then her Sentence ſignifies nothing. And of thoſe who own it, many diſpute the ſence and meaning of her Sentence; and whether

they deny the *Infallibility* of her Sentence, or diſpute the Senſe of it, in neither of theſe Caſes will it prove effectual to the deciding of any Difference.

But after all this Proviſion which we pretend God hath made for honeſt and ſincere Minds, Do we not ſee that Men fall into dangerous and damnable Errors, who yet cannot, without great Uncharitableneſs, be ſuppoſed not to be ſincerely deſirous to know the Truth, and to do the Will of God?

To this I ſhall briefly return theſe *Two* Things

I. That the ſame Errors are not equally Damnable to all. The innocent and (humanely ſpeaking) almoſt invincible Prejudices of Education in ſome Perſons, even againſt a Fundamental Truth; the different Capacities of Men, and the different Means of Conviction afforded to them; the greater and leſſer degrees of Obſtinacy, and a faulty Will in oppoſing the Truths propoſed

propoſed to them; all theſe, and perhaps ſeveral other Conſiderations beſides, may make a great difference in the guilt of Mens Errors, and the danger of them. Serm. IV.

II. When all is done, the Matter muſt be left to God, who only knoweth the Hearts of all the Children of Men. We cannot ſee into the Hearts of Men, nor know all their Circumſtances, and how they may have provoked God to forſake them, and give them up to Error and Deluſion, *becauſe they would not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be ſaved.* And as on the one hand God will conſider all Mens Circumſtances, and the Diſadvantages they were under for coming to the knowledge of the Truth, and make allowance to Men for their invincible Errors, and forgive them upon a general Repentance: So on the other hand, he who ſees the inſincerity of Men, and that the Errors of their Underſtandings did proceed from groſs Faults of their Lives, will deal with them accordingly. But if Men be honeſt and ſincere,

God, who hath ſaid, *if any Man will do his Will, he ſhall know of the Doctrine*, will certainly be as good as his Word.

It now remains only to draw ſome *Inferences* from this Diſcourſe, and they ſhall be theſe *Three*.

Firſt, From this *Text*, and what hath been Diſcourſed upon it, we may infer how ſlender and ill-grounded the Pretence of the Church of *Rome* to *Infallibility* is; whether they place it in the Pope, or in a General Council, or in both. The laſt is the moſt general Opinion; and yet it is hard to underſtand how *Infallibility* can reſult from the Pope's Confirmation of a General Council, when neither the Council was *Infallible* in framing its Definitions, nor the Pope in Confirming them. If the Council were *Infallible* in framing them; then they needed no Confirmation: If they were not; then *Infallibility* is only in the Pope that Confirms them, and then it is the Pope only that is *Infallible*. But no Man that reads theſe Words of our Saviour, *if any Man will do his Will, he ſhall*

ſhall know of the Doctrine, would ever imagine that the Biſhop of *Rome* (whoever he ſhall happen to be) were ſecured from all fatal Errors in Matters of Faith, much leſs that he were Endowed with an *Infallible* Spirit, in Judging what Doctrines are from God, and what not: For it cannot be denied, but that many of their Popes have been notoriouſly Wicked and Vicious in their Lives: Nay *Bellarmine* himſelf acknowledgeth, that for a Succeſſion of Fifty Popes together, there was not one Pious and Virtuous Man that ſate in that Chair; and ſome of their Popes have been Condemned and Depoſed for *Hereſie*; and yet after all this, the Pope, and the governing part of that Church, would bear the World in hand that he is *Infallible*. But if this Saying of our Saviour be true, that *if any Man will do his Will, he ſhall know of his Doctrine, whether it be of God*; then every honeſt Man that ſincerely deſires to do the Will of God, hath a fairer pretence to *Infallibility*, and a clearer Text for it, than is to be found in the whole Bible for the *Infallibility* of the Biſhop of *Rome*. What would Serm. IV.

the Church of *Rome* give, that there were but as expreſs a *Text* in Scripture for the *Infallibility* of their Popes, as this is for the ſecurity of every good Man, in his Judgment of Doctrines (which makes *Infallibility* needleſs?) What an inſufferable Noiſe, and what endleſs Triumphs would they make upon it, if it had been any where ſaid in the Bible, That if any Man be Biſhop of *Rome*, and ſit in St. *Peter*'s Chair, *he ſhall know of my Doctrine whether it be of God?* Had there been but ſuch a *Text* as this, we ſhould never have been troubled with their impertinent citation of *Texts*, and their remote and blind Inferences from *Paſce Oves*, and *ſuper hanc Petram*; *Feed my Sheep*; and *upon this Rock will I build my Church*; to prove the Pope's *Infallibility*. And yet no Man of Senſe or Reaſon ever extended the *Text* I am ſpeaking to, ſo far as to attempt to prove from it the *Infallibility* of every good Man; but only his ſecurity from fatal Errors and Miſtakes in Religion. The largeſt Promiſes that are made in Scripture of ſecurity from Error and Miſtake about Divine Things, are made to good Men, who ſincerely deſire to do

do the Will of God. And if this be ſo, we muſt conclude ſeveral Popes to have been the furtheſt from *Infallibility* of any Men in the World. And indeed there is not a more compendious way to perſwade Men that the Chriſtian Religion is a *Fable*, than to ſet up a Lewd and Vicious Man for the Oracle of it. Serm. IV.

Nay, I will go farther yet; That there are no other Promiſes made in Scripture, of Direction or Aſſiſtance, or Security from Miſtake, to any Church; but the ſame are made in as full and expreſs Terms to every good Man that ſincerely deſires to know the Truth, and to practiſe it. Is it Promiſed to the Church, or to the Paſtors of it, *I will be with you always?* And hath not our Saviour promiſed the ſame to every one that is obedient to his word? *John* 14. 23. *If a Man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* And does not the Apoſtle apply the ſame Promiſe to every good Chriſtian, *Heb.* 13. 5. *I will never leave thee, nor for-*

ſake thee? For where is the difference between theſe Expreſſions? *I will be with you*, and *I will make my abode with him? I will be with you always*, and *I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee?* Is it promiſed to the Church, that *the Spirit ſhall lead her into all Truth?* And is not the ſame Promiſe made to every good Man? *John* 14. 21. *He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: And he that loveth me, ſhall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifeſt my ſelf to him*; that is, God will reveal his Will to thoſe that love him, and keep his Commandments. Hath God promiſed *to build his Church upon a Rock?* And doth not our Saviour uſe the ſame Metaphor concerning every Man that doth the Will of God? *Mat.* 7. 24. *Whoſoever heareth theſe Sayings of mine, and doth them, is like a Wiſe Man that built his houſe upon a Rock.* So that if *to be built upon a Rock* ſignifies *Infallibility*, it belongs to every good Man, who ſincerely practiſeth what he knows, as much as to any Church.

When

Serm. IV.

When Men are enabled by God to work Miracles for the Confirmation of the Doctrines which they deliver, there is great Reaſon to believe that they are *Infallibly* aſſiſted in the delivery of thoſe Doctrines: But without this, 'tis the vaineſt thing in the World, for any Perſon or Church to pretend to it; becauſe they offer no Evidence fit to ſatisfie any Man, that they are ſo aſſiſted: And I do not hear that the Pope, among all his Priviledges, does pretend to the Power of Miracles.

Secondly, From hence likewiſe we may infer the great Reaſon of Error and Infidelity in the World. If any Man be an Infidel, it is not the fault of his Underſtanding, but of his Will; it is not becauſe there is not ſufficient Evidence that the Chriſtian Religion is from God, but becauſe Mens Intereſts and Luſts make them partial and incompetent Judges of Matters of Religion. The Evidence of the Chriſtian Religion is ſuch, as recommends it to every Man's Reaſon and Conſcience; ſo that (as St. *Paul* argues)

gues) *if the Goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt; In whom the God of this World hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, leſt the Light of the Glorious Goſpel of Chriſt, who is the Image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them,* 2 Cor. 4. 3, 4.

If Men did but ſtand indifferent for the entertainment of Truth, and were not ſwayed by the intereſt of any Luſt or Paſſion, I am confident that no Man that hath the Goſpel fairly propoſed to him, would continue an Infidel. If Men did but truly live up to the Principles of Natural Religion, they would eaſily be convinc'd, that the Chriſtian Religion, which is ſo ſuitable thereto, is from God.

Thirdly, and *Laſtly*, What hath been ſaid, is a great Argument and Encouragement to Obedience, and Holineſs of Life. Do we deſire not to be miſtaken about the Mind of God? Let us heartily endeavour to do his Will. If we would not be ſeduced by the Error of the Wicked; let us take heed of their Vicious Practices. The beſt way certainly

tainly to preſerve a right Judgment in Matters of Religion, is to take great care of a good Life. God's Goodneſs is ſuch, that he will not ſuffer any Man's Judgment to be betrayed into a Damnable Error, without ſome Vice and Fault of his Will. The Principles of Natural Religion are born with us, and imprinted upon our Minds, ſo that no Man can be ignorant of them, nor need to be miſtaken about them; and as for thoſe Revelations which God hath made of himſelf to the World, he hath been pleaſed to accompany them with ſo much Evidence, that an honeſt and ſincere Mind may eaſily diſcern them from Error, and Impoſture. So our Saviour hath aſſured us, That *if any Man deſire to do his Will; he ſhall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God.* Serm. IV.

On the other hand, if we ſee any oppoſe the clear Truth, or to depart from it, and to embrace groſs Errors and Deluſions, we may almoſt certainly conclude that there is ſome Worldly Intereſt or Luſt at the bottom of it. So our Saviour has likewiſe told us, *that the*

the reaſon why *Men love Darkneſs rather than Light, is, becauſe their Deeds are Evil; and every one that doth Evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, leſt his Deeds ſhould be* reproved. I will conclude this whole Diſcourſe with St. *Peter's* Exhortation, the 2*d* of *Pet.* 3. 17, 18. *Ye therefore, Beloved, ſeeing ye know theſe Things before, beware, leſt ye alſo being led away with the Error of the Wicked, fall from your own ſtedfaſtneſs. But grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt. To him be Glory, both now and for ever.* Amen.

SERM-

SERMON V.

The Nature of Covetouſneſs.

LUKE XII. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

AMong all the irregular Appetites of Men, there is none that is more common and unreaſonable, and of a more Univerſal bad Influence upon the Hearts and Lives of Men, than this of *Covetouſneſs*; and therefore in ſpeaking of this Vice, I ſhall

Vol. III. ſhall ſtrike at the Root of a great many others; even of Apoſtacy from God's Truth and Religion, of which Covetouſneſs, and the Love of this preſent World, is one of the moſt common Cauſes. So that if I can contribute any thing to the Cure of this great Diſtemper of Mens Minds, I ſhall in ſo doing remove that, which is the Cauſe and Occaſion of a great part of the Evils and Miſchiefs which are in the World. And to this end I have pitched upon theſe Words of our Bleſſed Saviour to his Hearers; *And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth.*

In which Words are theſe *Three* Things Obſervable.

Firſt, The *Manner* of the Caution which our Saviour here gives, *Take heed and beware*; he doubles it, to ſhew the great Need and Concernment of it.

Secondly,

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Secondly, The *Matter* of the Caution, or the Vice which our Saviour here warns his Hearers againſt, and that is *Covetouſneſs*; *Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs.*

Thirdly, The Reaſon of this Caution, *Becauſe a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth.* Humane Life is ſuſtain'd by a little, and therefore abundance is not neceſſary, either to the Support or Comfort of it. 'Tis not a great Eſtate and vaſt Poſſeſſions that make a Man happy in this World; but a Mind that is equal to his Condition, whatever it be.

Firſt, The *Manner* of the Caution which our Saviour here gives, *Take heed and beware.* This is a peculiar kind of Caution, and no where elſe, or upon any other Occaſion, that I know of, uſed in Scripture; in which, for the greater Emphaſis and Weight, the Words of Caution are doubled, as if the Matter were of ſo much Concernment, that no Caution about it could be too much; to

Vol. III. to signifie to us both the Great Danger of this Sin of *Covetousness*, and the Great Care Men ought to use to preserve themselves from it.

I. The great danger of this Sin; how apt we are to fall into this Vice, and of how pernicious a Consequence it is to those in whom it reigns.

1. How apt we are to fall into this Vice: And excepting those Vices which are immediately founded in a Man's Natural Temper and Constitution, there is none that Men have a more Universal propension to, than this of *Covetousness*. For there are *two* Things which Human Nature does more especially desire to be secured against, which are *Want*, and *Contempt*: And Riches seem to be a certain Remedy against both these Evils. And because Men think they can never be sufficiently secured against these, therefore their desire of Riches grows endless and insatiable; so that unless Men be very jealous and watchful over them-

themſelves, this Deſire will grow upon them, and enlarge it ſelf beyond all Bounds. Serm. V.

2. As Men are very apt to fall into this Vice, ſo is it of very pernicious Conſequence to thoſe in whom it reigns. The Miſchief of it is very great, and very extenſive: So St. *Paul* tells us, 1 *Tim.* 6. 8, 9, 10. where he preſſeth Men to be contented with a ſmall competency of the Things of this Life, becauſe of the great Danger and Miſchief of a Covetous Mind; *having Food and Raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be Rich* (that is, they that are bent and reſolved upon being Rich) *fall into Temptation and a Snare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful Luſts, which drown Men in Deſtruction and Perdition. For the love of Money is the root of all Evil.* But this I ſhall ſpeak more fully to, when I come to ſhew the great Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of this Vice.

II. This earneſt kind of Caution, as it ſignifies the Great Danger of this Sin of *Covetouſneſs*, ſo likewiſe

Vol. III. the great Care that Men ought to use to preserve themselves from it; for the greater the Danger is in any kind, so much the greater Care should be used for the avoiding of it. Men are not so Solicitously concerned to defend themselves against a slight Mischief; but when a terrible one threatens us, we should be continually upon our guard against it, and summon all our strength and force to resist it. Thus much for the *Manner* of the Caution.

I proceed to the *Second* Thing to be considered in the Text, *viz.* The *Matter* of the Caution, or the Vice which our Saviour here warns his Hearers against, and that is *Covetousness*; *Take heed and beware of Covetousness*. And in speaking of this, I shall consider these *two* Things.

I. Wherein the Nature of this Vice consists.

II. I shall Endeavour to shew the great Evil and Unreasonableness of it. I shall be large in both.

I. For the Nature of this Vice of Co-

Covetousness, The shortest Description that I can give of it is this; That it is *an inordinate desire and love of Riches*; but when this Desire and Love are *Inordinate*, is not so easie to be Determined. And therefore that we may the better understand what this Sin of *Covetousness* is, which our Saviour doth so earnestly Caution against, it will be requisite to Consider more particularly wherein the Vice and Fault of it doth consist; that whilst we are speaking against *Covetousness*, we may not under that General Word Condemn any thing that is Commendable, or Lawful. To the end then that we may the more clearly and distinctly understand wherein the Nature of this Vice doth consist, I shall Serm. V.

First, Endeavour to shew what is not Condemned under this Name of *Covetousness*, either in Scripture, or according to right Reason: And

Secondly, What is Condemned by either of these as a plain Instance or Branch of this Sin.

First, What things are not Condemned

ned under the Name of *Covetouſneſs*, either in Scripture, or according to right Reaſon, which yet have ſome appearance of it; namely, theſe *Three* Things.

1. Not a provident Care about the Things of this preſent Life.

2. Not a regular Induſtry and Diligence for the obtaining of them: Nor

3. Every Degree of Love and Affection to them. I mention theſe *Three*, becauſe they may all ſeem to be Condemned by Scripture, as Parts or Degrees of this Vice, but really are not.

1. Not a provident Care about the Things of this preſent Life. This indeed ſeems to be Condemned in Scripture as a Branch of *Covetouſneſs*; namely, in our Saviour's Sermon upon the Mount, *Mat.* 6. 25. *Take no thought for your Life, what ye ſhall eat, or what ye ſhall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye ſhall put on.* Here our Saviour ſeems to forbid all Care, even about the Neceſſaries of Life,

Life, Meat, and Drink, and Cloathing; much more about the Delights and Conveniencies of it. But this is not abſolutely and in ordinary Caſes intended by our Saviour to be Condemned, as I ſhall ſhew by and by, under the next Head. Serm. V.

2. Neither is a Regular Induſtry and Diligence for the obtaining of theſe Things Condemned in Scripture; tho' this alſo ſeems to be Prohibited by our Saviour in the ſame Chapter, *ver.* 26. *Behold the Fowles of the air: for they ſow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them*; and ver. 28. *Why take ye thought for Raiment? Conſider the Lilies of the Field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they ſpin.* In which words our Saviour ſeems to intimate, that we ought to depend upon the Providence of God for Food and Raiment, and to uſe no more Induſtry for the obtaining of them, than *the Fowles of the Air* do, or *the Lilies of the Field:* And the ſame may ſeem to be collected out of this Chapter of St. *Luke:* For after our Saviour had in my *Text* cautioned them againſt Covetouſneſs, and ſpoken to them a

VOL. III. Parable to that purpoſe, of *a Rich Man who enlarged his Barns, and laid up Goods for many years*, He infers from thence, *ver.* 22. that Men ſhould take no thought for the Things of this Life, nor uſe any Induſtry about them; *and he ſaid unto his Diſciples, therefore I ſay unto you, take no thought for your Life, what ye ſhall eat; neither for the Body, what ye ſhall put on.*

Now to avoid all Inconvenience from our Saviour's Words, I think that it is commonly ſaid by Interpreters, That he does here only condemn a diſtruſtful and anxious Care about the Things of this Life, and an over-ſolicitous Induſtry and Diligence for the obtaining of them; but that he allows a prudent Care and Regular Induſtry about theſe Things: And this were very well ſaid, if it would agree with the Scope and Deſign of our Saviour's Diſcourſe; but the Inſtances which he gives of *the Fowls of the Air*, and *the Lilies of the Field*, which are ſufficiently provided for without any Care and Induſtry of theirs, and which he ſeems to ſet before us for a Pattern,

behold

behold (ſays he) *the Fowls of the Air*, I ſay theſe Inſtances, which he gives, ſeem to exclude even all regular and ordinary Care and Diligence about theſe Things. Serm. V.

What ſhall we ſay then, that our Saviour intended by his Religion to take Men off from all Labour and Induſtry in their Callings? This ſeems to be unreaſonable; and indeed ſo it certainly were, if our Saviour had given this for a ſtanding and ordinary Rule to all Chriſtians; and not only ſo, but contrary to the Apoſtle's Doctrine, who conſtantly charged Chriſtians to labour with great diligence in their Callings, that they might be able to provide for themſelves, and their Families.

But this Diſcourſe of our Saviour's was not intended for a General and Standing Rule to all Chriſtians; but only deſigned for his Diſciples, to take *them* off from all Care about the Things of this Life, that they might attend upon his Perſon, and wholly give up themſelves to that Work to which he had called them. And therefore St.

Vol. III. *Luke* takes notice, that after he had cautioned his Hearers in general againſt *Covetouſneſs*, he applies himſelf particularly to his Diſciples, and tells them that he would have them ſo far from this Vice of *Covetouſneſs*, that they ſhould not ſo much as uſe that ordinary Care and Induſtry about the Things of this Life, which is not only lawful, but neceſſary for Men in all ordinary Caſes, *ver.* 22. *and he ſaid unto his Diſciples, therefore I ſay unto you, take no thought for your Life, what you ſhall eat.* And this agrees very well with the Direction which our Saviour gave to his Diſciples, when he firſt ſent them forth to Preach, *Mat.*10. 9. *Provide neither gold, nor ſilver, nor braſs, in your purſes, neither coat, nor ſcrip*; which no Man ever underſtood as a general Law to all Chriſtians, but as a particular Percept to the Apoſtles at that time.

And if this be our Saviour's meaning, there is then no Reaſon to think, that this Caution againſt *Covetouſneſs* does forbid Men to uſe a provident Care and regular Induſtry about the Things of this Life.

3. Nor

Serm. V.

3. Nor is every Degree of Love and Affection to the Things of this World Condemned in Scripture, as any Branch, or Part of this Vice of *Covetouſneſs*; but ſuch a Love of the Things of this World as is truly conſiſtent with the Love of God, and a due and a ſerious care of our Souls, is allowed both by Scripture and Reaſon, St. *John* indeed ſeems to condemn all love of the World, and of the Things of it, as utterly inconſiſtent with the love of God, 1 *Joh.* 2. 15. *Love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World; if any Man love the World, the love of the Father is not in him:* But this is according to the *Hebrew* Phraſe and manner of ſpeaking, to forbid Things *Abſolutely*, which are to be underſtood only *Comparatively*. So *Mat.* 6. 19. *Lay not up for your ſelves Treaſures upon Earth; but lay up for your ſelves Treaſures in Heaven*; *i. e.* be not ſo ſolicitous for the good Things of this World, as for the Glory and Happineſs of the next. And *Luke* 12. 4. *Be not afraid of them that kill the Body*; that is, fear *them* not ſo much as *him that*

Vol. III. *that can deſtroy both Body and Soul in Hell:* And *Luke* 14. 26. *If any Man come unto me, and hate not his Father and Mother, and all that he hath*; that is, if he do not love me more than all theſe Things, *he cannot be my Diſciple:* And *John* 6. 27. *Labour not for the Meat which periſheth, but for that which endureth to Everlaſting Life*; that is, labour not ſo much for the one as for the other, be not ſo ſolicitous about the Things of this Life, as about the great Concernments of Eternity. So likewiſe *Coloſ.* 3. 2. *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the Earth*; *i. e.* ſet them more on Things above, than on earthly Things. So here, *Love not the World, neither the Things of the World*; that is, do not over-value them, do not love them ſo much as not to be able to part with them for Chriſt; *for if any Man* thus *love the World*, he does not love God as he ought. So that when the Scripture commands us *not to love the World*, this is to be underſtood *Comparatively*, that we ſhould not love theſe Things in Compariſon of God, and the great Concernments of another World: But

it

it does not forbid us to love theſe Things in a due Degree, and with a due Subordination to thoſe Things which are more Excellent, and of Infinitely greater Concernment to us. For nothing can be more inconſiſtent than to recommend to Men Diligence in their worldly Callings and Employments (as the Scripture frequently does) and that in order to the attaining of the good Things of this Life; and yet to forbid us to love theſe Things at all. For if Men have no degree of love to them, the beſt Argument to Diligence for the obtaining of them would be taken away. Beſides, that we are commanded in Scripture to be thankful to God for beſtowing on us the Bleſſings of this Life, and we are to love him upon this account. Now can any Man love the Giver, for beſtowing ſuch Gifts upon him, which if he do as he ought, he muſt not love?

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You ſee then what thoſe Things are, which the Scripture does not Condemn as any Branch or Degree of this Vice of *Covetouſneſs*; a provident Care,

Vol. III. Care and a regular Induſtry, and ſuch a degree of Love to the Things of this World, as is conſiſtent with the love of God, and the care of our Souls.

Secondly, I come now to ſhew what is Condemned in Scripture under the name of *Covetouſneſs*; and by this we ſhall beſt underſtand wherein the Nature of this Sin doth conſiſt. Now *Covetouſneſs* is a word of a large Signification, and comprehends in it moſt of the Irregularities of Mens Minds, either in *deſiring*, or *getting*, or in *poſſeſſing*, and *uſing* an Eſtate. I ſhall ſpeak to each of theſe ſeverally.

I. *Covetouſneſs* in the *Deſire* of Riches, conſiſts in an eager and unſatiable Deſire after the Things of this World. This the Scripture Condemns, tho' it be free from Injuſtice, as it ſeldom happens to be. This inſatiable deſire of Wealth God plainly condemns by his Prophet, *Iſa.* 5. 8. *Wo unto them that joyn houſe to houſe, and lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midſt of the*

the Earth. And this is that which our Saviour here in the *Text* ſeems to have a more particular reſpect to, when he cautions Men againſt the Sin of *Covetouſneſs*, as appears both form the Reaſon which he gives of this Caution and from the Parable whereby he illuſtrates it. From the Reaſon which he gives of this Caution, *Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for the Life of Man doth not conſiſt in the abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth.* As if he had ſaid, take great care to ſet ſome Bounds to your Deſires after the Things of this World. For whatever Men may imagine, it is certain in Experience, that it is not the Abundance of outward Things which makes the Life of Man happy. *Wealth and Content* do not always dwell together; nay, ſo far from that, that perhaps they very ſeldom meet. Serm. V.

And the Parable likewiſe which follows upon this Caution, doth ſufficiently ſhew this to be our Saviour's meaning; for he illuſtrates what he was ſpeaking of, by a Rich Man whoſe deſire of Wealth was never ſatisfied, but he was continually increaſing his Eſtate, and enlarging his Barns,

Vol. III. Barns, to make more room ſtill for his Fruits, that he might *lay up Goods in ſtore for many years.* The Parable does not ſo much as intimate any indirect and unjuſt ways of Gain, which this Man uſed to increaſe his Eſtate; but condemns his inſatiable Deſire and Thirſt after more; ſo that even *this* alone is *Covetouſneſs*, and a great fault, tho' it were attended with no other; becauſe it is unreaſonable, and without end.

II. There is *Covetouſneſs* likewiſe in *getting* an Eſtate; and the Vice or Evil of this kind of *Covetouſneſs* conſiſts chiefly in theſe *three* Things.

1. In the uſe of unlawful and unjuſt ways to get or increaſe an Eſtate. He is a *Covetous Man*, who by the greedineſs of Gain is tempted to do any unjuſt Action, whether it be in the way of Fraud and Deceit, or of Violence and Oppreſſion. And this perhaps is that which is moſt frequently in Scripture call'd *Covetouſneſs*. And this I take to be the meaning of the Tenth Commandment, *Thou ſhalt not Covet*; wherein

Wherein is forbidden all unjuſt deſire of that which is another Man's, and all unjuſt endeavours and attempts to deprive him of it. For ſo our Saviour renders it, *Mark* 10. 19. where he ſays to *the young Man* that came to be directed by him, *what good thing he ſhould do, that he might Inherit Eternal Life*; *Thou knoweſt the Commandments, do not commit Adultery, do not Kill, do not Steal, do not bear falſe witneſs*; and then inſtead of the Tenth Commandment, *Thou ſhalt not Covet*, or rather by way of explication of it, he adds μὴ ἀποστερήσῃς, *defraud not*; as if he had ſaid in a word, be not injurious to thy Neighbour in any kind, in deſiring or indeavouring to deprive him of any thing that is his. As the *Romans* in their Laws were wont to comprehend thoſe Crimes which had no Proper Name, by the general Name of *Stellionatus*, and *dolus malus*; ſo here in the *Decalogue*, after God had inſtanced in the chief and moſt common ſorts of Injuries which Men are guilty of towards their Neighbour, as *Murder*, *Adultery*, *Theft*, *Bearing of falſe Witneſs*; he ſumms up all

Serm. V.

all the reſt, which could not ſo eaſily be reckon'd particulary in this ſhort and general prohibition, *Thou ſhalt not Covet*; that is, thou ſhalt not be injurious to thy Neighbour in any other kind; *in his Wife, or Servant, or Houſe, or Cattle, or any thing that is his. Covetouſneſs*, or any inordinate deſire of that which is our Neighbours, being commonly the Root and Parent of all theſe kind of Injuries.

And for the ſame Reaſon St. *Matthew*, inſtead of *the Tenth Commandment*, put this general Precept, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thy ſelf*, as being the ſenſe of it in other words; *Mat.* 19. 18, 19. *Thou ſhalt do no Murder, thou ſhalt not commit Adltery, thou ſhalt not Steal, thou ſhalt not bear falſe Witneſs, honour thy Father and thy Mother, and thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thy ſelf.* And this Command of *loving our Neighbour as our ſelves*, our Saviour elſewhere tell us was the ſum of the Duties of the *Second Table*; and it is the ſame in ſenſe with that Precept of our Saviour, *Mat.* 7. 12.

There-

Therefore all things whatſoever ye would that Men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them. That is, as thou wouldeſt have no Man to be injurious ſo to thee in any thing, ſo be not thou to any other Man in any kind. And the Apoſtle, *Rom.* 13. 8, 9, 10. ſhews us upon what account this General Precept, *Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thy ſelf*, is the Summ of the *Second Table. He that loveth another hath fulfilled the Law: For this, Thou ſhalt not commit Adultery, thou ſhalt not Kill, thou ſhalt not Steal, Thou ſhalt not bear falſe Witneſs, Thou ſhalt not Covet; and if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, namely, Thou ſhalt love thy Neighbour as thy ſelf.* And then he adds in the next words, *Love worketh no ill to his Neighbour; therefore Love is the fulfilling of the Law.* That is, he that truly loves his Neighbour, will not be injurious to him in any kind: *Therefore Love is the ſumm of the Law.* Serm. V.

The Deſign of all this is to ſhew that he that is injurious to his Neighbour in his Eſtate in any kind, is pro-

perly guilty of the Sin of *Covetousness*, which is forbidden in the *Tenth Commandment*. So that all Arts of Fraud and Oppression, whereby Men endeavour to get and increase an Estate by the injury of their Neighbour, is a Branch of the Sin of *Covetousness*.

2. The Vice of *Covetousness* in *getting* Wealth, does likewise consist in an anxious and tormenting Care about obtaining the Things of this Life. The regular and due Temper of a Man's Mind about the Things of this World, is to commit our selves to the Providence of God in the use of honest and lawful Endeavours, and to refer the success of all to his good Pleasure; and whatsoever is beyond this, is a Branch of the Evil Root of *Covetousness*. We distrust the Providence of God, when after we have used our best Endeavours, and begg'd his Blessing upon them, we torment our selves about the issue and event of Things. And as this is sinful, so it is vain, and to no purpose. Diligence in our Business is the way to get an Estate,

Eſtate; but no Man was ever the Richer, for tormenting himſelf, becauſe he was not ſo. The Reaſon why Men ſeek the Things of this World, and take pains to get them, is to make Life convenient and comfortable; and conſequently he that torments himſelf about the getting of theſe Things, contradicts himſelf in his own Deſign, becauſe he makes his Life *Miſerable*, that he may make it *Comfortable*. Serm. V.

3. The Sin of *Covetouſneſs* in *getting*, conſiſts in ſeeking the Things of this Life, with the neglect of Things infinitely better, and which are of far greater and nearer Concernment to us. He is a *Covetous Man*, who ſo minds the World, as to neglect God, and his Soul; who is ſo buſie and intent upon making proviſion for this Life, as to take no care of the other; ſo concern'd for a few days of his Pilgrimage here, as to have no conſideration and regard for his Eternal Abode in another World. God allows us to provide for this Life, and conſiders the Neceſſities which

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do continually press us while we are in the Body: But while we are making provision for these *Dying Bodies*, he expects that we should remember that we have *Immortal Souls*; which since they are to have an endless duration in another World, ought to be provided for with far greater Care. 'Tis an inordinate desire of Riches, when Men so lay out all their Care and Industry for the obtaining of them, as if nothing else were to be regarded, as if no Consideration at all were to be had of another World, and of that better part of our selves which is to continue and live for ever. All Desires and Endeavours after Riches, which take Men off from the business of Religion, and the Care of their Souls, which allow Men neither the leisure and opportunity, nor the heart and affection to love God, and to serve him, are to be referred to this Sin of *Covetousness*, which is here condemned by our Saviour in the *Text*.

III. There

Serm. V.

III. There is *Covetouſneſs* likewiſe in *poſſeſſing* or *uſing* an Eſtate: And this conſiſts chiefly in theſe *three* Things.

Firſt, When Men are ſordid towards themſelves, and cannot find in their hearts to uſe and enjoy what they poſſeſs; are continually adding to their Eſtate, without any deſign of enjoyment; and take infinite pains to raiſe a huge Fortune, not that they may uſe it, but that they may be ſaid to have it. This is a degree of Covetouſneſs even beyond that of the Rich Man in the Parable after the *Text:* For he it ſeems, after he had *enlarg'd his Barns* to his Mind, and *laid up goods for many years*, deſigned at laſt to have *taken his eaſe*, and have fallen to the enjoyment of what he had gotten; *to have eat and drank, and to have been merry*; and this, tho' it proved but a fooliſh deſign in the iſſue, he being *cut off in that very inſtant* when he was come to the point of ſatisfaction and enjoyment;

yet is it infinitely more reaſonable, than to take great pains to get an Eſtate, with a full Reſolution never to be the better for it.

Secondly, Men are *Covetous* in *keeping* an Eſtate, when they do not uſe it Charitably; when they cannot find in their hearts to ſpare any thing out of their Abundance, to the Relief of thoſe who are in want. Tho' a Man get an Eſtate without *Covetouſneſs*, and have an heart to enjoy it, yet ſo far he is *Covetous*, as he is *Uncharitable*. He loves Mony more than he ought, who having enough to ſpare, chuſeth rather to keep it, than to do good with it, and to uſe it to one of the principal ends for which God gives an Eſtate.

Thirdly, They likewiſe are *Covetous*, who place their chief Truſt and Happineſs in Riches, who (as the Expreſſion is, *Job* 31. 24.) *make Gold their hope, and ſay to the fine Gold, thou art my confidence.* And this is the Reaſon why *Covetouſneſs* is ſo often in

in Scripture call'd *Idolatry*; becauſe the *Covetous* Man ſets up his *Riches* in the place of *God*, putting his Truſt and Confidence in them, and ſetting his whole Heart upon them, loving them as he ſhould love *God only, with all his Heart, and Soul, and Strength:* And therefore *Mammon*, which ſignifies *Riches*, is in Scripture repreſented as a *Deity*, and *the Covetous* Man, as a Servant, or Worſhipper of *Mammon.* Serm. V.

So that in Scripture he is *a Covetous Man* who placeth his chief Felicity in a great Fortune, and will venture to loſe any thing, rather than to part with *that*; who will quit his Religion, and violate his Conſcience and run the hazard of his Soul, rather than forfeit his Eſtate, or the hopes of advancing it to his Mind.

And this in times of Trial and Difficulty, is the great Temptation to which the *Covetous Man* is expoſed. When a Man may not only ſave himſelf, but get conſiderable

Vol. III. advantage by departing from the Truth; and in changing his Religion, may have a good Summ of Money to boot, or which is equal to it, a good Place; This to *a Covetous Mind* is a very ſtrong Temptation, and almoſt irreſiſtible. When Error and Deluſion can bid ſo high, and offer ſo good Terms, no wonder if it gain ſome Proſelytes among the *Covetous* and *Ambitious* part of Mankind. This the Apoſtle gives warning of, as a great Temptation to Rich Men in Times of Suffering, 1 *Tim.* 6. 9, 10. *They that will be Rich, fall into Temptation, and a Snare: for the love of Money is the root of all Evil; which while ſome have luſted after, they have erred from the Faith.* The young Man in the Goſpel is a ſad Inſtance of this kind, who choſe rather to leave Chriſt, than to part with his great Poſſeſſions. And ſuch a one was *Demas*, who *forſook the Apoſtles*, and *Chriſtianity it ſelf, to cleave to this preſent World.*

Thus I have done with the *Firſt* Thing I propoſed to ſpeak to, the Nature

Nature of this Vice, which our Saviour in the *Text* Cautions Men ſo earneſtly againſt; *Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs.* I ſhould now proceed in the *Second* place to ſhew the Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of this Vice. But that ſhall be the Subject of another Diſcourſe. Serm. V.

SERM-

SERMON VI.

The Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Covetouſneſs.

The Second Sermon on

LUKE XII. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

I Have made entrance into a Diſcourſe upon theſe Words, in which I told you there are *Three* Things Obſervable.

Firſt, The *Manner* of the Caution which our Saviour here gives, *Take heed and beware.*

Secondly,

Secondly, The *Matter* of the Caution, or the Sin which our Saviour here warns his Hearers againſt, *Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs:* And

Thirdly, The *Reaſon* of this Caution, becauſe *a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth.*

In Diſcourſing of the *Second* of theſe, *viz.* the *Matter* of the Caution, I propoſed,

1. To Conſider wherein the Nature of this Vice of *Covetouſneſs* does conſiſt.

2. To ſhew the Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of it.

The *Firſt* of theſe I have diſpatched, and now go on to the *Second*, *viz.* To ſhew the great Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of the Vice of *Covetouſneſs*.

Now *Covetouſneſs* will appear to be very

very Evil, and Unreaſonable, upon theſe following Accounts. Serm. VI.

I. Becauſe it takes Men off from Religion, and the Care of their Souls.

II. Becauſe it tempts Men to do many Things which are inconſiſtent with Religion, and directly contrary to it.

III. Becauſe it is an endleſs and inſatiable Deſire.

IV. Becauſe the Happineſs of Humane Life doth not conſiſt in Riches.

V. Becauſe Riches do very often contribute very much to the Miſery and Infelicity of Men.

Firſt, *Covetouſneſs* takes Men off from Religion, and the Care of their Souls. The *Covetous Man* is wholly intent upon this World; and his inordinate Deſire after theſe Things, makes him to neglect God, and the Eternal Concernments of his Soul. He employs all his Time, and Care, and

and Thoughts about theſe Temporal Things, and his vehement love and eager purſuit of theſe Things ſteals away his Heart from God, robs him of his Time, and of all Opportunities for his Soul, and diverts him from all ſerious Thoughts of another World, and the Life to come. And the Reaſon of this is, that which our Saviour gives, Mat. 6. 24. *No Man can ſerve two Maſters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or elſe he will hold to the one, and deſpiſe the other. Ye cannot ſerve God, and Mammon.* No Man can ſerve two Maſters ſo different as God and the World are, becauſe they will give croſs Commands, and enjoyn contrary Things. God he calls upon us to mind the Duties of his Worſhip and Service, to have a ſerious regard to Religion, and a diligent Care of our Souls: But the Cares of the World, and the Importunity of Buſineſs, and an eager appetite of being Rich, call us off from theſe Divine and Spiritual Employments, or diſturb us in them. God calls upon us to be Charitable to thoſe that are in want, to be willing to diſtribute,

ſtribute, and ready to communicate to the Neceſſities of our Brethren: But our Covetouſneſs pulls us back, and hales us another way, and checks all Merciful and Charitable Inclinations in us. God calls us to Self-Denial, and ſuffering for the Sake of him, and his Truth, and commands us to preferr the keeping of Faith, and a good Conſcience, to all Worldly Conſiderations whatſoever: But the World Inſpires us with other Thoughts, and whiſpers to us *to ſave our ſelves, not to be Righteous over much*, and rather to truſt God with our Souls, than Men with our Bodies and Eſtates. Serm. VI.

If we ſet our Hearts and Affections ſtrongly upon any thing, they will partake of the Object which they are Converſant about; for *where our Treaſure is* (as our Lord hath told us) *there will our Hearts be alſo.* If a great Eſtate be our chief End and Deſign, if Riches be our Treaſure, and our Happineſs, our Hearts will be found *among the Stuff.* We cannot beſtow our Affections freely upon *Two* Objects. We cannot intenſly love God, and the World;

World; for no Man can have *Two* Ultimate Ends, *Two* Principal Deſigns. Our *Riches may increaſe*; but if we *ſet our hearts upon them*, and give them the chief place in our Affections, we make them our Lord and Maſter Whatever we make our Ultimate End, we give it a Sovereignty and Empire over us; we put our ſelves under its Dominion, and make our ſelves ſubject to all its Commands. So that if *it bid us go, we muſt go; come, we muſt come; do this, we muſt do it; becauſe we are under Authority:* The World is our Maſter, and we are its Slaves. Now he that is under the Rule and Dominion of this Maſter, muſt withdraw his Obedience from God, and in many Caſes decline Obedience to his Laws.

This worldly Covetous Diſpoſition was that which made thoſe in the Parable to make ſo many Excuſes, when they were Invited to the Supper, *Luke* 14. 18. *One had bought a Farm, and he could not come: Another had bought ſo many Yoke of Oxen, and therefore he deſired to be excuſed.* Riches do ſo fill the Covetous Man's Heart, and

and the Cares of the World ſo poſſeſs his Mind, that he hath no room left in his Soul for any other Gueſts: *Intus exiſtens prohibet alienum, that which is full already, can receive no more.* The Covetous Man's Heart is taken up with ſuch Things as keep out God, and Chriſt, and better Things. *If any Man love the World, and the Things of it* to this Degree, St. *John* tells us that *the love of the Father is not in him.* In the Parable of *the Sower*, Mat. 13. 7. Our Saviour repreſents to us *the Cares of the World, which choak the word of God, by Thorns which ſprang up among the Seed, and ſtifled the growth of it.* The Cares of the World will not ſuffer the Word of God to *take deep root in our hearts*, and to have any permanent effect upon them: And *Ezek.* 33. 31. God gives this as a Reaſon why the People of *Iſrael* would not hearken to the Words of his Prophet, becauſe their Hearts were upon the World. *They come unto thee*, (ſays God there to the Prophet) *as the People cometh, and they ſit before thee as my People, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: For with their mouth they ſhew much love, but*

Serm. VI.

Vol. III. *their heart goeth after their Covetouſneſs.*

A Heart that is deeply engaged in the World, will ſtand out againſt all the Invitations, and Promiſes, and Threatnings of God's Word. When the Word of God invites ſuch Perſons, it is like making Love to thoſe who have already fix'd their Hearts and Affections elſewhere; the Promiſes and Threatnings of the Goſpel ſignifie but very little to ſuch Men, becauſe their Hearts are ſet upon worldly Things, and all their Affections are bent that way; all their Hopes and Deſires are Worldly; to be Rich, and abound in Wealth; and all their Fears are of Poverty and Loſs. Now ſuch a Man can only be moved with the Promiſes and Threatnings of Temporal Things; for no Promiſes have any effect upon us, but ſuch as are of ſome Good, which we care for and value: Nor are any Threatnings apt to move us, but ſuch as are of ſome Evil which we dread, and are afraid of. And therefore when Eternal Life, and the Happineſs of another World, are offered to a worldly-minded Man, he does not deſire it, he is not at all ſenſible of the value of it;

it; the Man's Heart is full already of other Hopes and Desires, and *the full Soul loatheth the Honey-Comb.* Promise to such a Man the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Pleasures of God's Presence, and the Joys of Eternity, this does not signifie to such a Man any Good or Happiness that he is sensible of, or knows how to relish. And on the other hand, threaten him with the loss of God, and an Eternal Separation from that Fountain of Happiness, and with the unspeakable Anguish and Torments of a long Eternity; these Things, tho they be terrible, yet they are at a distance, and the Covetous Man is enured to Sense, and is only to be moved with Things present and sensible; he cannot extend his Fears so far as another World, so long as he finds himself well and at ease, as to the Things of this present Life. Serm. VI.

If we would affect such a Man, we must offer to his Consideration something that is fit to work upon him; threaten him with breaking open his House, and rifling his Coffers, and carrying away his full Bags; with que-

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ſtioning his Title to his Eſtate, or ſtarting a precedent Mortgage, or ſomething of the like Nature: Theſe Things indeed are dreadful and terrible to him; now you ſpeak intelligibly to him, and he underſtands what you mean: Tell him of a good Bargain, or an advantagious Purchaſe, offer him decently a good Bribe, or give him notice of a Young Heir that may be circumvented, and drawn in, then you ſay ſomething to him that is worthy of his regard and attention; the Man may be tempted by ſuch Offers and Promiſes as theſe: But Diſcourſe to him *with the tongue of Men and Angels*, of the Excellency of Virtue and Goodneſs, and of the Neceſſity of it, to the obtainnig of a Glory and Happineſs that ſhall neither have bounds nor end; and *lo! thou art unto him as a very lovely Song of one that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play well upon an Inſtrument; for he hears thy words, but he will not do them*; as the Prophet expreſſeth it, *Ezek.* 33. 32. Such Diſcourſes as theſe they look upon as fine talk, or a melodious ſound, that vaniſheth into air, but leaves no impreſſion behind

behind it. Perhaps even theſe dull and ſtupid kind of Men are affected a little for the preſent with the livelineſs of the Romance, and the Poetical Vein of the Preacher; but theſe Things *paſs away like a Tale that is told*, but have no laſting effect upon them. So effectually doth *Covetouſneſs*, and *the love of this preſent World*, obſtruct all thoſe Paſſages, through which the Conſideration of Religion and heavenly Things ſhould enter into our Minds. Serm. VI.

Secondly, As Covetouſneſs hinders Men from Religion, and takes them off from a due Care of their Souls; ſo it many times tempts and engageth Men to do many Things contrary to Religion, and inconſiſtent with it: It is the Natural Source and Fountain of a great many Evils, and the Parent of moſt of the worſt of Vices. He that will engage deep in the World, muſt uſe much more guard and caution than moſt Men do, to do it without Sin. How many Temptations is the Covetous Man expoſed to in the *getting*, and in the *ſecuring*, and in the *ſpending* and *enjoying* of a great Eſtate? It is no

Vol. III. eaſie Task to reckon them up, and much more difficult to eſcape or reſiſt them; and yet each of theſe Temptations bring him into the danger of a great many Sins. For,

I. In the *getting* of an Eſtate, he is expoſed to all thoſe Vices which may ſeem to be ſerviceable to this Deſign. Nothing hath been the Cauſe of more and greater Sins in the World, than *Covetouſneſs*, and *making haſte to be Rich*. It is *Solomon*'s Obſervation, *Prov.* 28.20. *He that maketh haſte to be Rich, ſhall not be Innocent.* . He does not ſay he *cannot* be Innocent, but he ſpeaks as if there were all the probability in the World that he will not prove to be ſo; but being in ſo much *haſte*, will almoſt unavoidably fall into a great many overſights and faults. And the *Heathen* Poet makes the very ſame Obſervation in more Words.

Inde ferè ſcelerum cauſæ, nec plura venena
Miſcuit, aut ferro graſſatur ſæpius ullum

Hu-

Serm. VI.

Humanæ mentis vitium, quam ſæva Cupido
Immodici Cenſûs: nam dives qui fieri vult,
Et citò vult fieri; Sed quæ Reverentia Legum,
Quis Metus aut Pudor eſt unquam properantis avari?

"This, ſays he, is the Cauſe of "moſt Sins: Nor is there any Vice of "which the Mind of Man is capa- "ble, that hath been guilty of more "Murders and Poyſonings, than a fu- "rious Deſire of immoderate Wealth; "for he that *will be Rich*, will *make* "*haſte* to be ſo: And what Reverence "of Laws, what fear or ſhame was "ever ſeen in any Man that was in "haſte to be Rich? And this is the ſenſe of what the Apoſtle ſays con- cerning this Vice of *Covetouſneſs*, this peremptory Reſolution of being Rich, 1 *Tim.* 6. 9, 10. *They that will be Rich, fall into Temptation, and a Snare, and into many fooliſh and hurtful Luſts, which drown Men in Deſtruction and*

VOL. III. *Perdition. For the love of Money is the root of all Evil.* If this Vice of *Covetouſneſs* once Reign in us, if we have once fix'd our End, and ſet up this Reſolution with our ſelves, that *we will be Rich*, we ſhall then make every thing ſtoop and ſubmit to this Deſign. A *Covetous* Man will make his Principles and his Conſcience to bend to his Reſolution of being Rich, and to bow to that Intereſt. The eager Deſire of Riches makes Men to purſue them in indirect and uncharitable ways, by Falſhood and Perjury, by undermining and over-reaching, by diſſembling and flattery, by corrupting and imbaſing of Commodities, by falſe Weights and Meaſures, by taking Fees with both Hands, by making uſe of their Power and Wit to oppreſs and defraud their Brother, by impoſing upon his Ignorance and Simplicity, or by making a Prey of his Poverty and Neceſſity.

Covetouſneſs many times makes Men Cruel and Unjuſt; nay, it makes them guilty of the worſt ſort of Cruelty and Oppreſſion. For (as one ſays well) the

the Covetous Man oppreſſeth his Neighbour, not for any good to himſelf; for he does not enjoy what he tears and rends from others; ſo that he is of that moſt hateful kind of Beaſts of Prey, that kill other Creatures, not to eat them, but that they may ſee them lie dead by them. Lyons and Wolves kill out of hunger; but the Covetous Man, like a Serpent or Scorpion, ſtings and bites others to Death, not for his need, but for his pleaſure and recreation. *Covetouſneſs* is the Parent of the moſt monſtrous Sins; becauſe it fixeth a Man in a Reſolution of Getting an Eſtate by any means. If Falſeneſs and Deceit, Violence and Oppreſſion will further this End; the earneſt deſire of the End tempts Men to uſe any ſort of Means whereby the End may be compaſſed; and tho' a Man may have ſome averſneſs from them at firſt, yet that wears off by degrees, and the ſtrong deſire of the End, reconciles a Man at laſt to the love and liking of the Means, how wicked and unwarrantable ſoever. *Covetouſneſs* tempted *Achan* to ſteal the accurſed Thing, and *Gehazi* to lye to the

Vol. III. the Prophet, and *Ahab* to Oppreſs and Murder *Naboth*. Nay, a ſmall Summ tempted the Covetous Mind of *Judas* to betray his Maſter, and his Saviour And how do many Men every Day ſtrain their Conſciences to get an Eſtate, and hazard their Souls for Money; nay exchange their Souls, which are of more value than the whole World, for a very ſmall Portion of it?

II. There are likewiſe many other Temptations which a Covetous Man is expoſed to in the *keeping* and *ſecuring* of an Eſtate, when he hath got it. A Covetous and worldly-minded Man, when it comes to the Trial, is in great danger of quitting his Religion, and *making ſhipwrack of Faith and a good Conſcience*. When his Eſtate comes to be in hazard, he is very apt to fall off from the Truth; 'tis an Hundred to One but in theſe Circumſtances he will chuſe rather to violate his Conſcience, than to forfeit his Eſtate. What the Devil falſly ſaid of *Job*, is true of the Covetous Man, *he does not ſerve God for nought*. Upon theſe Terms it was, that Chriſt and the Young Man parted;

parted; *he had great Poſſeſſions*, and it troubled him to part with them. When *Demas* was brought to the Trial, and put to it, whether he would ſtick to the Profeſſion of the Goſpel, or his Worldly Poſſeſſions, he quitted St. *Paul*, and declared for the World, the 2*d* of *Tim.* 4. 10. *Demas hath forſaken me, having loved this preſent World.* So far had his Covetous Humour beſotted him, as to make him prefer his preſent Intereſt in theſe Temporal Things, before thoſe Eternal Rewards which the Goſpel offered. Serm. VI.

III. There are likewiſe many Temptations which Men are expoſed to in the *enjoying* and *ſpending* of a great Eſtate. It is hard to have a great Eſtate, and not to be maſter'd by the love of it; not to have our Cares and Thoughts, our Hearts and Affections ſwallowed up by it. 'Tis no eaſie thing for a Man that hath Riches, not to over-value them, and love them more than he ought; not to be puft up by them, and ſo place his Truſt and Confidence in them. *Prov.* 18. 11.

The

Vol. III. *The Rich Man's Wealth is his ſtrong City, and as an high Wall in his own Conceit.* The Covetous Man ſetteth up his Riches in the place of God, and is apt *to fall down before this Golden Calf, and Worſhip it: To ſay to the Gold, thou art my Hope, and to the fine Gold, thou art my Confidence: To Rejoyce, becauſe his Wealth is great, and becauſe his hand hath gotten much.*

Riches are a great Temptation to Irreligion and Atheiſm. Upon this account *Agur* wiſely prays to God for a moderate Eſtate, becauſe of the danger of both the Extreams of Riches and Poverty; becauſe of the great and violent Temptations which Men are expoſed to in both theſe Conditions, *Prov.* 30. 8, 9. *Give me neither Poverty, nor Riches; but feed me with food convenient for me.* Why not Riches? *Leſt I be full, and deny thee, and ſay, who is the Lord?* And much more do Riches tempt Men to Pride and Inſolence towards others, *Prov.* 18. 23. *The Poor uſeth entreaties, but the Rich anſwereth roughly.* Mens Spirits are commonly blown up and bloated

bloated with their Fortunes, and their Pride, and Stomach, and Paſſion do uſually increaſe in proportion to their Wealth. Serm. VI.

And many times Riches Tempt Men to Luxury, and Intemperance, and all manner of Exceſs. Rich Men have a mighty Temptation to allow themſelves all manner of unlawful Pleaſures; becauſe he who hath a great Eſtate, is furniſh'd with that to which hardly any thing can be denied. And this is not inconſiſtent with a Covetous Humour; for there are many times Men who are Covetous in getting, for no other End and Reaſon, but that they may *ſpend it upon their Luſts.* As Covetouſneſs ſometimes ſtarves other Vices, ſo ſometimes it ſerves them, and is made ſubordinate to a Man's Ambition, or Luſt, or ſome other reigning Vice. There is no ſuch abſolute inconſiſtency between Riches and Virtue, but that it is poſſible that a Man that is very Rich, may be very good. But yet if we conſult Experience, I doubt it will be found a true Obſervation, that there are

are but very few Rich Men, who are not insupportable, either for their *Vanity*, or their *Vices*; so that our Saviour had Reason for that severe Question, *How hard is it for a Rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God?* And well might he upon this account pronounce *the Poor*, (*the poor in Estate, as well as the Poor in Spirit*) *blessed*, as we find he does, *Luke* 6. 20. *Blessed be ye Poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.* They oftner enter there, than the Rich.

Thirdly, Covetousness is likewise Evil and Unreasonable, because it is an endless and insatiable Desire. A Covetous Mind may propose to it self some certain bounds and limits, and a Man may think that when he is arrived to such an Estate, and hath raised his Fortune to such a pitch, that he will then sit down contented and satisfied, and will seek after no more. But he deceives himself in this Matter; for when he hath attain'd to that which he proposed to himself, he will be never the nearer being satisfied. So *Solomon* tells us, *Eccles.* 5. 10. *He that loveth*

loveth Silver, ſhall not be ſatisfied with Silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increaſe; for no degree of Wealth can ſatisfie a Covetous Mind. He may think ſo before-hand, that if he had ſo much it would be enough; but when he hath attain'd it, he will be ſtill reaching after more; for *Covetouſneſs* is a Diſeaſe of the Mind, and an Unnatural Thirſt, which is inflamed by that which ſhould quench it. Every Deſire that is Natural, is ſatisfied and at reſt, when it hath once obtained the thing it deſired. If a Man be hungry, he is ſatisfied when he hath eaten; or if he be thirſty, his Thirſt is allay'd and quench'd when he hath drank to ſuch a proportion as Nature doth require; and if he eat and drink beyond this meaſure, Nature is oppreſs'd and it is a burthen to him. But *Covetouſneſs* is not the Thirſt of Nature, but of a Diſeaſed Mind. It is the Thirſt of a Fever, or of a Dropſie; the more a Man drinks, the more he deſires, and the more he is inflam'd. In like manner, the more the Covetous Man increaſeth his Eſtate; the more

Serm. VI.

Vol. III. more his Deſires are enlarged and extended, and he finds continually new Occaſions and new Neceſſities; and every Day as he grows Richer, he diſcovers new Wants; and a new Poverty to be provided againſt, which he did not think of before, comes into his Mind: *Et minus hæc optat, qui non habet; and he that is without theſe Things, covets them leſs than he that hath them.* So far is a Covetous Man's attaining to Riches from giving him ſatisfaction, that he who hath ſcarce any thing at all, is many times much nearer to Contentment, than he that hath got ſo much; nay, ſo unreaſonable is this Appetite, as to deſire more, even when the Man knows not how to beſtow what he hath already. This *Solomon* obſerved long ſince, (for the Vices and Humours of Men are much the ſame in all Ages) *Eccleſ.* 4. 8. *There is one alone, and there is not a ſecond; yea he hath neither Child nor Brother; yet is there no end of all his labour, neither is his Eye ſatisfied with Riches, neither ſaith he for whom do I labour, and bereave my Soul of good? This is alſo vanity, yea it is a ſore travel.* And indeed what can be greater Vanity and

and Folly, than to be at certain pains and labour all the days of a Man's Life, and yet to be uncertain all the while, for whom it is that he drudgeth, and taketh all theſe pains. Serm. VI.

And if this be the Nature of this Vice, the more it gets, ſtill to covet the more; then nothing can be more Unreaſonable, then to think to gratifie this Appetite, becauſe at this rate, the Man can never be contented, becauſe he can never have enough; nay ſo far is it from that, that every new acceſſion to his Fortune, ſets his Deſires one degree farther from reſt and ſatisfaction: For a Covetous Mind having no bounds, it is very probable that the Man's Deſire will increaſe much faſter than his Eſtate; and then the Richer he is, he is ſtill the Poorer, becauſe he is ſtill the leſs contented with his Condition. However, it is impoſſible that the Man's Deſire ſhould ever be ſatisfied; for Deſire being always firſt, if the Man's Deſire of Riches advanceth and goes forward as faſt as Riches follow, then it is not poſſible for Riches ever to overtake the Deſire of them,

Vol. III. no more than the hinder Wheels of a Coach can overtake thoſe which are before: Becauſe as they were at a diſtance at firſt ſetting out, ſo let them go never ſo far, or ſo faſt, they keep the ſame diſtance ſtill.

So that it is the vaineſt thing in the World, for a Man to deſign his own ſatisfaction by the perpetual increaſe of his Fortune, becauſe Contentment doth not ariſe from *the abundance of what a Man hath*, but it muſt ſpring from the inward frame and temper of our Minds; and the true way to it, is not to enlarge our Eſtate, but to contract our Deſires; and then it is poſſible that a Man's Money and his Mind may meet; otherwiſe the purſuit is endleſs, and the farther a Man follows Contentment, it will but flee ſo much the farther from him; and when he hath attained the Eſtate of a Prince, and a Revenue as great as that of *France*, or the *Turkiſh* Empire, he ſhall be farther from being ſatisfied, than when he began the world, and had no more before-hand than would juſt pay for his next Meal.

I ſhould now have proceeded to the *Fourth* Thing, whereby the unreaſonableneſs of *Covetouſneſs* doth appear; becauſe the Happineſs of Humane Life doth not conſiſt in Riches. And this is the Argument which I ſhall more eſpecially inſiſt upon, becauſe it is that which our Saviour uſeth here in the *Text*, to take Men off from this Vice. *The Life of Man conſiſteth not in the abundance of the Things which he poſſeſſeth.* And this certainly is one of the beſt and moſt Reaſonable Conſiderations in the World, to moderate Mens Affections towards theſe Things. Every Reaſonable Deſire propounds ſome End to it ſelf. Now to what purpoſe ſhould any Man deſire to increaſe his Wealth ſo vaſtly beyond the proportion of his Neceſſities, and real Occaſions? What Benefit and Advantage would it be to any Man, to have a Hundred times more than he knows what to do withall? But I ſhall not Enlarge upon this Argument at preſent, but refer it to another Opportunity. Serm. VI.

SERMON VII.

The Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Covetouſneſs.

The Third Sermon on

LUKE XII. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs for a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

AFter I had, in my Firſt Diſcourſe upon this Subject, given you an Account of the *Nature* of the Vice of *Covetouſneſs*, I proceeded in the next place to repreſent the great Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of it.

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First, Becauſe it takes Men off from Religion, and the Care of their Souls.

Secondly, Becauſe it tempts Men to many Things which are inconſiſtent with Religion, and directly contrary to it.

Thirdly, Becauſe it is an endleſs and inſatiable Deſire. Thus far I have gone; I proceed to the

Fourth Thing, whereby the Unreaſonableneſs of *Covetouſneſs* will yet farther appear. Namely, becauſe the Happineſs of Humane Life doth not conſiſt in Riches, and Abundance. And this I ſhall inſiſt upon ſomewhat the more largely, becauſe it is the Argument which our Saviour makes uſe of here in the *Text*, to take Men off from this Sin. *The Life of Man conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth: Therefore take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs.* And this certainly is one of the beſt and moſt Reaſonable Conſiderations in the World,

World, to moderate our Affections to- Serm.
wards theſe Things. For every Rea- VII.
ſonable Deſire propounds ſome End to
it ſelf. Now to what purpoſe ſhould
any Man deſire to increaſe his Wealth
ſo vaſtly, and beyond the proportion
of his Neceſſities and real Occaſions?
What Benefit and Advantage can it be
to any Man, to have an Hundred, or
perhaps a Thouſand times more than he
knows what to do withall?

And as for the other World, no Man ever pretended that the heaping up Riches here, would be uſeful to him there; *Riches will not deliver him in the day of wrath.* No Man was ever ſo ſenſeleſs, as to imagine that he could take his Eſtate along with him into the other World; or if he could, that Heaven was to be bought with Money; or that a great Eſtate, or a great many Lordſhips would recommend him to the favour of God. 'Tis true indeed, a Man may ſo uſe Riches in this World, as thereby to promote and further his Happineſs in the next. But then it is likewiſe as true, that a Man may ſo demean himſelf in a Poor and

Vol. III. Low Condition, as thereby to render himſelf as acceptable to God, and capable of as great a Reward, as the Richeſt Man can do. The Poor Woman's *Two Mites*, chearfully given to Pious and Charitable Uſes, will go as far in the other World, and find as great a Reward there, as the Rich Man's *Thouſands of Gold and Silver.* And a Man may be as truly Generous and Charitable of a little, as out of the greateſt Fortune. Beſides that the Poor Man's Contentedneſs in a mean Condition, is more admirable in it ſelf, and more valuable with God, than for a Rich Man to be ſo.

So that the great Uſe of Riches reſpects this World, and the beſt Uſe of them is in ways of Charity; and the Poor Man's Charity, tho' it cannot be of ſo great an extent in the Effects of it, yet in the degree of its Virtue and Merit it may be equal to it.

Now the *Two* great Deſigns of Men, in regard to this World, are theſe.

1. To

1. To maintain and ſupport our Lives as long as we can. Serm. VII.

2. To make our Lives as truly Happy and Comfortable as we can.

To the *Firſt* of theſe Ends, namely, the ſupport of our Lives, a very little will ſuffice; and 'tis not much that is neceſſary to the *other*, to render our Lives as truly Comfortable as this World can make them; ſo that a vaſt Eſtate is not neceſſary to either of theſe Ends; for a Man may *live* by having what is neceſſary, and may *live comfortably* by having that which is convenient.

No Man lives the longer by having Abundance; it is many times an occaſion of ſhortning a Man's Life, by Miniſtring to Exceſs and Intemperance; but ſeldom of prolonging it. And ſetting aſide the vain Fancy and Conceit of Men, no Man lives the more Happily, for having more than he hath real uſe and occaſion for.

Theſe

Vol. III. Theſe *two* Heads I ſhall at preſent ſpeak to, to make out the full force of this Reaſon, which our Saviour here uſeth; namely, *That a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.*

I. That Riches do not contribute to the ſupport of our Lives; nor,

II. To the Happineſs and Comfort of them. That is, they are not neceſſary to either of theſe Ends. For by *Riches* I mean *whatever is beyond a ſufficient competency of thoſe things, which are requiſite to the real Uſes and Occaſions of Humane Life.*

Firſt, Riches and Abundance do not contribute to the ſupport of our Lives. And this our Saviour very well repreſents to us in the Parable immediately after the *Text*, of *the Rich Man*, who was continually encreaſing his Eſtate, ſo that *he had goods laid up for many years*; but he lived not one jot the longer, for being provided of the Conveniences of Life for ſo long a time

time before-hand; for whilſt he was bleſſing himſelf, as if he had ſecured his Happineſs ſufficiently for this World, he was uncertain of his continuance in it; God having Decreed to take him out of this World, at that very time when he had determin'd to enter upon the Enjoyment of thoſe Things, which he had been ſo long laying up. God ſays to him, *Thou Fool, this night ſhall thy Soul be required of thee; and than whoſe ſhall thoſe things be which thou haſt provided?* That is, What good then will all theſe Things do thee, when thou haſt no further uſe of and occaſion for them? So that if he had been the pooreſt Man in the World, and had not been provided for the next Meal, he might have lived as long as he did with all his Stores. You ſee then that in this ſenſe, *a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.* For notwithſtanding all his great Barns, and the abundance of Fruits he had ſtowed in them, he did not live one jot the longer, than the pooreſt Man might have done. Serm. VII.

Secondly,

Vol. III. *Secondly*, Nor do Riches contribute to the Happineſs and Comfort of our Lives. Happineſs is not to be bought and purchas'd together with great Lordſhips; it depends upon a great many Cauſes, among which a competency of the Things of this World is one; but Riches and Abundance is none of them. The Happineſs of this World conſiſts in theſe *Two* Things.

1. In the Enjoyment of Good. And,

2. In a State of freedom from Evil.

Now Riches do not neceſſarily make a Man Hapyy in either of theſe Reſpects.

Firſt, For the Enjoyment of Good, A competent Eſtate ſuitable to the Condition and Station in which God hath ſet us in this World, will give a Man whatever Nature and Reaſon can deſire; and Abundance cannot make a Man Happier. If a Man had an hundred times more than he needed, he could

could but enjoy it according to the Capacity of a Man; for if he conſulted his own Happineſs, and would truly enjoy what he hath, he muſt Eat and Drink within the bounds of Temperance and Health, and muſt wear no more Cloaths than are for his Convenience. 'Tis true, he hath wherewithal to put on a new Suit every Day; which is to be uneaſie all the Days of his Life; and may Drink, if he pleaſe, every time out of a new Cup; which would be a vain expence, and a great trouble to his Servants, without any manner of Convenience to himſelf. Serm. VII.

But then if Riches fall into the *Covetous* Man's Hands, they can be no Happineſs to him, becauſe he hath no Heart to enjoy them. He hath indeed the Eſtate of a Rich Man, but he wants the Comfort of it, becauſe he hath the Mind of a Poor Man; and Enjoyment is all the Felicity that is in a great Fortune; what we enjoy is ours, but what we lay up, is from that time not ours, but ſome bodies elſe.

He

He that heaps up Riches, and enjoys them not, is Rich only for his Heir, but a Beggar for himself.

We are apt to pity Poor Men, and too apt to despise them; but surely no Man's Condition is more to be deplored than his, who starves himself in the midst of Plenty, and being surrounded with the Blessings of God, turns them into the greatest Curse; for it is a much greater Curse, not to use an Estate when one has it, than not to have. It is like a plentiful Table without an Appetite.

But it may be it is a great Happiness to have a great Estate, tho' a Man never use it; the Pleasure of seeing it, and telling it over, may be like the removing of Billets, which may warm a Man as much as if he had spent and consumed them. But *this* is *Real*, and the other only *Imaginary*. I doubt not, many Covetous Men take a great deal of pleasure in ruminating upon their Wealth, and in re-counting what they have; but they have a great deal of tormenting care and fear about it; and

and if they had not, it is very hard to understand where the reaſonable Pleaſure and Happineſs lies of having Things to no end. It is at the beſt, like that of ſome fooliſh Birds, which they ſay, take pleaſure in ſtealing Money, that they may hide it; as if it were worth the while, for Men to take pains to dig Silver out of the Earth, for no other purpoſe, but to melt it down, and ſtamp it, and bury it there again. Serm. VII.

But many Neceſſities may happen, which we cannot fore-ſee, and it is good to provide againſt them. There is nothing ſo bad, but ſomething may be ſaid in excuſe of it; and I do not deny, but that a provident Care againſt the common Accidents of Humane Life is very commendable; but it is Unreaſonable to think of providing againſt all poſſibilities, which it is impoſſible either to fore-ſee, or prevent. 'Tis very poſſible, that after a Man hath gotten the greateſt Eſtate imaginable, he may loſe it all by ſome Fatal Accident; and then to what purpoſe was all this proviſion made, when

when that which was ſo long a time a getting, and laying up, is loſt at once?

Beſides, that it is not eaſie to conceive what Neceſſity can happen to a *Covetous* Man, to give him an occaſion of uſing his Eſtate; he cannot find in his Heart to beſtow it upon himſelf in ſuch Things as are convenient, nay, almoſt neceſſary for the ſupport of his Life; for no Man can feed his Servants more penuriouſly than he does himſelf; all the Religion he values himſelf upon, is a ſtrict obſervance of the *Leſſian* Diet, which he recommends to thoſe few that can deny themſelves to Dine with him, in hopes to make better Meals upon his Eſtate when he is gone. And if he be ſo penurious to himſelf, the Neceſſities of others are not like to move him to be liberal. I can but imagine one Occaſion that could tempt ſuch a Man to lay out what he hath; namely, when one part of his Eſtate is in danger, to ſpend the other to ſecure it. And yet even in that Caſe, if his Cauſe were not very clear and good, he

he would go nigh to loſe it, uſing it as he does himſelf; that is, by ſtarving it. And if this be all, then a Man had as good be without an Eſtate, and ſave himſelf the trouble either of getting it, or ſecuring it; for if it were all gone, he might live as well as he does, and that with half the Care and Pains. Serm. VII

Secondly, The Happineſs of this World conſiſts in a State of freedom from Evil. Now the great Evils that Men are liable to in this World, are ſuch as are incident to them either in the courſe of their Lives, or at the time of their Death; and Riches do not contribute to Mens Happineſs, by freeing them from either of theſe. I ſhall ſpeak to theſe ſeverally.

I. Not from the Evils which are incident to Men in the courſe of their Lives. Theſe are of *Two* kinds, *inward*, or *outward*.

1. *Inward* Evils, by which I mean thoſe of the Mind; and our greateſt troubles are from within, from the

Vol. III. anxiety of our Minds, and the guilt of our Conſciences, from the vicious inclinations of our Wills, and the irregularity and diſorders of our Paſſions. Now Riches were an admirable thing indeed, and worth our Coveting, if they would help to Cure theſe Diſtempers of our Minds; but they are the leaſt fitted for ſuch a purpoſe of any thing in the World: For not he that hath the greateſt Eſtate, but he that hath the feweſt and moſt reaſonable Deſires, and the beſt govern'd Paſſions, and the moſt virtuous Inclinations, is the Happieſt Man, and dwells neareſt to Satisfaction. *Nemo malus fœlix*, *No bad Man can be Happy*, tho' he were Poſſeſſed of the whole World; becauſe he hath that within him, which frets and diſcontents him, which galls his Spirit, and keeps his Mind reſtleſs and uneaſie; and he that does not enjoy *himſelf*, can enjoy nothing elſe.

Did but Men know how much Happineſs hath been enjoyed by many a Pious and Virtuous Man in a mean Fortune, how quiet and eaſie their Minds

Minds have been, how much fuller of Joy and Pleaſure, than the Heart of any *Covetous* Worldling ever was in his moſt proſperous Eſtate, and when *his Corn, and Wine, and Oyl abounded*; did we (I ſay) but know this, we ſhould not envy the Men of mighty Fortunes. *Nam neque divitibus contingunt gaudia ſolis. Rich Men are not the only happy People in the World.* If they be not *Good* as well as *Rich*, Happineſs is a greater Stranger to their Dwellings, than to the Cottages of Poorer Men. Serm. VII.

Now Riches are ſo far from helping to make Men Good, that they are one of the greateſt Temptations to them in the World to be otherwiſe; which is the Reaſon why our Saviour ſays, *it is ſo very hard for a Rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; becauſe conſidering the powerful and almoſt irreſiſtable Temptations of a great Eſtate, and the impotency and weakneſs of Humane Nature to govern it ſelf in a plentiful Fortune, it is very hard for a Rich Man to be ſo Good as he ought, it requires a great force and firmneſs of Reſolution, a very

Vol. III. ſolid and vigorous conſtitution of Mind, to bear a great Fortune, and not to be corrupted by it; and a Man hath never more Reaſon to implore God's gracious help and aſſiſtance, and to conſult his own beſt and cooleſt Thoughts, to know what he ought to do, and how he ought to demean himſelf, than when the outward Bleſſings of this Life flow in amain upon him; *felicitate corrumpimur, nothing ſooner debaucheth Men than Proſperity*; and he is a very happy Man, whom Wealth and a good Fortune do not make licentious and diſſolute; becauſe theſe tempt Men with the power and opportunity to do all the ill that their wicked Hearts can deſign, or deſire.

The Temptation of Riches, and the Power that goes along with them, is ſo forcible and prevalent, that the Devil, who is a ſagacious Spirit, and hath great and long experience in this kind, when he was making the Experiment, whether Chriſt was a meer Man, or the Son of God, reſerved this for his laſt Temptation; reſolving if that would not do, to try him no farther.

ther. After he had aſſaulted him in ſeveral kinds, he repreſents to him at laſt that which was ſufficient to have ſurfeited two of the moſt inſatiable Deſires of Humane Nature, *Ambition* and *Covetouſneſs*, even *all the Kingdoms of the World, and the glory of them, in a moment*, or *point of time*; he brings all the Rays of this Glory to one Point, that the Temptation might kindle and take hold the ſooner; and ſays to him, *all this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worſhip me.* He ſuppoſed with great probability, that if he were but a meer Man, the ſtrongeſt and moſt reſolved Mind would bend and yield to ſo dazzling a Temptation as this; but when he ſaw that this Temptation was rejected, he found himſelf baffled, and gave him over; ſince this did not move him, he concluded now, That he was *the Son of God indeed*, and that it was in vain to tempt him any farther. Serm. VII.

From all this it appears, that Riches are ſo far from making Men Virtuous, that nothing is more dangerous to Virtue, than a full Condition; if Men

have not a great degree of Grace, as well as Diſcretion to manage it. *Solomon* tells us, that *the proſperity of Fools deſtroyeth them.*

And yet how do moſt of us Court this Temptation, and are forward to thruſt and venture our ſelves upon it? There are a great many other Things, in which moſt Men make a right Judgment of themſelves, and will readily acknowledge that they are altogether unfit for them. Every Man will not take upon him to be a Phyſician, or a Lawyer, to preſcribe Medicines in dangerous Caſes, and to give Counſel to Men in knotty and difficult Points about their Eſtates; but every Man thinks himſelf fit enough to be Rich, and ſufficiently qualified to manage a great Eſtate, if he can but get it; when perhaps there are few Things in the World, which Men are more inſufficient for, than to weild and govern a great Fortune, nor wherein there is greater danger and miſcarriage. It is not every Bodies Talent, to be Wealthy, and Wiſe; Rich, and Innocent.

2. As

Serm. VII.

2. As for the *Outward* Evils of this Life, ſuch as Want, and Contempt, Bodily Pains and Diſeaſes, Unhappineſs in Friends and Relations, a great Eſtate is by no means a ſufficient Security or Remedy to a *Covetous* Man againſt theſe.

(1.) As for want. And ſurely one would think, that if Riches were good for any thing, they are a very proper Remedy againſt this Evil, and a moſt certain and Infallible Cure of it; but Experience tells us quite otherwiſe. *Socrates* was wont to ſay, that, "To "want nothing, is the Priviledge of "the Deity, and proper to God alone; "but to ſtand in need of as few things "as may be, is the Priviledge of a "Wiſe and Good Man, and a State of "Happineſs, next to that of God him-"ſelf; becauſe he that hath the feweſt "Wants is the moſt eaſily ſupplied, and "is next to him that is Self-ſufficient. Now a Man of moderate Deſires hath infinitely fewer Wants than a *Covetous* Man; and becauſe his Deſires are moderate, a moderate Eſtate will ſatisfie

them: But the Wants of a *Covetous* Mind are never to be ſupplied, becauſe it hath ordered the Matter ſo cunningly, as to want even that which it hath; ſuch a Man does not get Riches to ſupply his Wants, but is content to Want that he may be Rich; inſomuch that he hath not the Heart to uſe his Eſtate for the ſupply of his real neceſſities. How many do almoſt ſtarve themſelves in the midſt of Plenty and Abundance? There is no greater ſign of Poverty, than to be deeply in debt; now the *Covetous* Man lives and dies in debt to himſelf. Some Men have been ſo ſhamefully penurious and ſtingy to themſelves, as even *to die, to ſave Charges*, which yet perhaps is the moſt generous thing they ever did in their whole Lives, in reſpect to the World; becauſe by this means ſome Body may come to the Enjoyment of their Eſtates, and that great Dunghil which they have been ſo long in raking together, may by this means come to be ſpread abroad for the Publick Benefit.

So

Serm. VII.

So that if a *Covetous* Man were poſſeſs'd of the Wealth of both the *Indies*, all this would not free him from Want. A Poor Man's wants may be ſatisfied, when he hath obtained what he wants: But the *Covetous* Man labours of an incurable want; becauſe he wants that which he hath, as well as that which he hath not.

(2.) As for Contempt, Riches will not ſecure a *Covetous* Man againſt this neither; nay ſo far is it from that, that he is commonly the more ridiculous and deſpiſed for living Poor in the midſt of Abundance, than if he were really ſo. Did I ſay *really* ſo? He is the moſt *really Poor* of all other Men. For as one ſays well, *The Rich Poor Man is emphatically Poor.*

(3) Neither will Riches free Men from bodily Illneſs and Pain. The Rich are liable to as many Diſeaſes, and as ſharp Pains as the Poor, and they have commonly leſs Patience to bear them than the Poor; becauſe they have not been inured to other ſorts of Evils. They

Vol. III. They that have been accuſtomed to Labour, are generally beſt fitted to bear Pain; the Rich are commonly more tender and delicate, and have a quicker ſenſe of Pain, more Matter, and greater quantity of Humours to feed a Diſeaſe, and to enflame it to a greater heighth.

I muſt not here forget that there is a ſort of Rich Men, I mean the penurious Miſers, who ſtarve themſelves more than the Poor, and fare many times more hardly; and for this Reaſon, tho' they be not in danger of the Diſeaſes that come from Intemperance, and a plentiful Table; yet they are liable to the Diſeaſes which proceed from ſtarving and emptineſs; which the Phyſicians ſay are more dangerous than the other: So that neither the Prodigal nor the Niggardly Rich Man is ſecured from Bodily Pains and Diſeaſes by a great Eſtate.

(4.) Neither will Riches ſecure a Man from being unhappy in his Friends and Relations. A great Eſtate will not make a Man's Children either more Dutiful

Dutiful or Wiſe, than the Children of meaner Perſons; and if they be not ſo, his Eſtate cannot be ſo great an Happineſs to him, as *they* may prove an Affliction. *Solomon* tell us, that the very fear and apprehenſion of this did very much imbitter the fruit of all his Labour; and he ſeems to ſpeak it ſenſibly, and very probably with a melancholy Reflection upon his Son *Rehoboam*, *Eccleſ.* 2. 18, 19. *Yea I hated all my labour which I had taken under the Sun, becauſe I ſhould leave it unto the Man that ſhall be after me; and who knows whether he ſhall be a Wiſe Man, or a Fool? Yet ſhall he have rule over all my labour, wherein I have labour'd, and wherein I have ſhew'd my ſelf Wiſe under the Sun.* Who knows whether he ſhall be a Wiſe Man, or a Fool? He ſeems to ſpeak doubtfully: But he had a very ſhrewd gueſs what kind of Man his Son would make; for he ſpeaks more deſpondingly in the next Words, (*ver.* 20, 21.) *therefore I went about to cauſe my heart to deſpair of all the labour which I took under the Sun*; (that is, when I thought ſeriouſly of it, I began to think that all the pains I had taken to get an Eſtate,

Serm. VII.

Vol. III. Eſtate, would be but to little purpoſe;) *for there is a Man* (ſaith he) *whoſe labour is in Wiſdom, and in Knowledge, and in Equity* (that is, who by wiſe and honeſt means hath rais'd a great Eſtate) *yet to a Man that hath not laboured therein* (that is, to a Man who is endowed with none of theſe Qualities) *ſhall he leave it for his Portion; this alſo is Vanity, and a great Evil.*

And as for Friends, tho' the Rich Man have many that will call themſelves ſo, yet he had almoſt as good have none; for he can hardly ever know whether they be ſo or not, unleſs he chance to fall into Poverty, and then indeed the change of his Condition may give him that Advantage and Opportunity, which otherwiſe he is never like to have, of diſcerning between his Friends and his Flatterers. Thus you ſee that Riches are no ſecurity againſt the moſt conſiderable Evils which attend us in the courſe of our Lives.

II. When we come to Die, nothing will miniſter leſs Comfort to us at

at that time, than a great Eſtate. It is then a very ſmall Pleaſure to a Man, to reflect how much he hath gotten in the World, when he ſees that he muſt leave it; nay, like the Young Man in the Goſpel, *he goes away* ſo much the more *ſorrowful, becauſe he had great Poſſeſſions.* All the Things of this World ſeem very inconſiderable to a Man, when he approaches to the Confines of the other: For when he ſees that he muſt leave this World, then he would fain make a Virtue of Neceſſity, and begins to change his apprehenſions of theſe Things, and to have very ſlight and mean thoughts of them, when he is convinc'd he can enjoy them no longer. What the Philoſopher was wont to ſay of the Pleaſures of this World, is as true of Riches, and all the other Enjoyments of it; That, "if they did but put on the ſame "Countenance, and look with the ſame "Face, when they come to us, that "they will do, when they turn from us "and take their leave of us, we ſhould "hardly entertain them. Serm. VII.

Now if a Man have placed his chief Happineſs in this World, as the *Covetous*

Vol. III. *tous* Man does in his Riches, his great trouble when he comes to die, will be, that he must leave them. Nothing could be more severely said to the *Covetous* Man, than that which God says to the *Rich Man* in the Parable; *Thou Fool, this night shall thy Soul be required of thee, and then whose shall these things be?* For of all things in the World such Men cannot endure to think of parting with these things, or that what they have got with such great Care and Labour, should come to the Possession of another.

And therefore when we are so hot and eager in the pursuit of these things, we should do well to consider, *how they will appear to us in a dying hour.* And this Consideration well imprinted upon our Minds, would make us very careful, to treasure up other kind of Comforts to our selves against such a time, and to Labour after those Things which we shall never grow out of conceit withall, but shall value them to the last, and then most of all, when we come to die, and leave this World. For as a Poet of our own says Excellently,

'Tis

'Tis not that which first we love:
But what dying we approve.

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Thus I have done with the *Fourth* Thing, whereby the Evil and Unreasonableness of *Covetousness* doth appear; namely, that the Happiness of Humane Life doth not consist in a great Estate; *the Life of Man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* The great Ends of *Religion*, and *Covetousness*, are very different. The great End which *Religion* proposeth to it self, is *Happiness*: But the great End which *Covetousness* proposeth is *Riches*; which are neither a necessary nor a probable means of *Happiness*. I should now have proceeded to the *Fifth* and *Last* Particular; namely, That Riches are so far from being the Happiness of Humane Life, that they usually contribute very much to our Misery, and Sorrow; as will appear if we consider these *Four* Things.

First, The Labour and Care which *Covetous* Men are at in the Getting of a great Estate.

Secondly,

Secondly, The Anxiety of keeping it, together with the Fears of loſing it.

Thirdly, The Trouble and Vexation of having loſt it; and,

Fourthly, The dreadful and heavy Account which every Man muſt give of a great Eſtate. But theſe Particulars, together with the *Application* of this whole Diſcourſe, I ſhall refer to another Opportunity.

SERM-

SERMON VIII.

The Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of Covetouſneſs.

The Fourth Sermon on

LUKE XII. 15.

And he ſaid unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs; for a Man's Life conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things which he poſſeſſeth.

IN my Two laſt Diſcourſes on this Subject, I have repreſented the Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of the Vice of *Covetouſneſs* in *Four* Particulars. I proceed now to the *Fifth* and laſt Particular, whereby I told you the Evil and Unreaſonableneſs of it would appear; *viz.*

That Riches are ſo far from being the Happineſs of Humane Life, that they uſually contribute very much to our miſery and ſorrow; as will evidently appear, if we conſider theſe *Four* Things.

Firſt, The Labour and Care which the *Covetous* Man is at in the getting of a great Eſtate.

Secondly, The Anxiety of keeping it, together with the Fears of loſing it.

Thirdly, The Trouble and Vexation of having loſt it.

Fourthly, The heavy and dreadful Account which every Man muſt give of a great Eſtate.

Firſt, The Labour and Care which the *Covetous* Man hath in getting a great Eſtate. He that will be Rich muſt ſweat for it, and refuſe no pains and trouble; he muſt *riſe up early, and lie down late, and eat the bread of Carefulneſs.*

fulneſs. A Slave that Diggs in the Mines, or Rows in the Gallies, is not a greater Drudge, than ſome *Covetous* Worldlings are; only with this difference, that the *Covetous* Man thinks that he labours and takes all theſe Pains for himſelf; whereas the Slave underſtands the matter more truly, and thinks that he does it for another. Serm. VIII.

But beſides the Pains he takes, he is full of Care and Anxiety. How is he through the greedy deſire of *having*, rack'd between the hopes of getting, and the fear of miſſing what he ſeeks? The Apoſtle obſerves what tormenting Cares accompany this Vice, 1 *Tim.* 6. 10. *The love of Money* (ſaith he) *is the root of all evil*; not only of the Evil of Sin, but of the Evil likewiſe of Trouble and Diſquiet. For it follows, *which while ſome coveted after, they have pierced themſelves through with many ſorrows:* Variety of Troubles attend them that *will be Rich.*

Vol. III. *Secondly,* If we consider the Anxiety of keeping what they have got, together with the Fear of losing it again, this is another great part of a *Covetous* Man's infelicity. The Rich Man here in the Parable after the *Text*, when he saw his Estate coming upon him so fast, cries out, *what shall I do?* Poor Man! who would not pity his Condition, to see him put to this difficulty and distress, and to hear him make as heavy a moan as the Poorest Man could do! Now that he hath a plentiful Harvest, and his Crop hath answered, if it were possible, his *Covetous* Desire, he is in a great deal of perplexity, and almost at his wits end how to dispose of it; he was horribly afraid lest any of it should be lost for want of a secure place to store it up in. *What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my Fruits?* Where was the difficulty of this? Why, he was loth to lose his Fruits, and he was loth to lay out Money to secure them. But upon farther Consideration, he resolves *of the two Evils to chuse the least*; and *he said, this will I do, I will pull down my Barns, and build greater,*

greater, and there will I beſtow all my Fruits, and my Goods. But why could he not let the Barns he had ſtand, and build more? No, that he did not think ſo well, he loved to ſee all his good Things at one view, and what a goodly ſhow they would make together. Beſides that it is the humour of *Covetouſneſs*, when it breaks out into Expence, to over-do; the *Miſer's Buildings* are like his *Feaſts*, always Extravagant. The *Covetous* Man (as to the buſineſs of Expence) is like a Coward as to Fighting, he declines it as long as he can; but when he is puſh'd to the laſt neceſſity, he grows deſperate, and lays about him. Serm. VIII.

Tantis parta malis, curâ majore metuque
Servantur, miſera eſt magni cuſtodia cenſûs.

Riches which are got with ſo much trouble, are not kept without greater fear and care. A Covetous Man is in nothing more miſerable, than in the Anxiety and Care of diſpoſing and ſecuring what

he hath got. When a Man's Desires are endless, his Cares and Fears will be so too.

Thirdly, As great an Evil as any of the former, is the vexation of having lost these Things. If by any Accident the Man happens to be deprived of them, then he takes on heavily, hangs down his head and mourns, *as a Man would do for his first-born*; and is ready to cry out with *Micah*, *they have taken away my Gods, and what have I more?* Upon every little loss the *Covetous* Man is undone, tho' he have a hundred times more left than he knows what to do withal. So deeply are the Hearts of Earthly-minded Men many times pierced with Earthly Losses, as with *Rachel to refuse to be comforted.* Nay St. *Paul* observes, that *the sorrow of the World* sometimes *worketh death*, 1 *Cor.* 7. 10.

Fourthly, But the saddest Consideration of all is, that heavy and dreadful Account that must one day be given, both of the getting and using of a great Estate. They that have got an

an Eſtate by Fraud and Falſehood, or by Oppreſſion and *grinding the face of the Poor*, may read their Doom at large, *James* 5. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. *Go to now ye Rich Men, weep and howl for your miſeries that ſhall come upon you; your Riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten; your Gold and Silver is canker'd, and the ruſt of them ſhall be a witneſs againſt you, and ſhall eat your fleſh as it were fire: ye have heaped treaſure together for the laſt days. Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cryeth, and the cries of them which have reaped, are entred into the ears of the Lord of Sabbath; ye have lived in pleaſure on the earth, and been wanton, ye have nouriſhed your hearts as in a day of ſlaughter.* Serm. VIII.

And we muſt be accountable likewiſe for the uſing of our Eſtates. God gives them to us in truſt, and the greater they are, the more we are to account for; ſo much as we need is *ours*, but beyond what will ſupport us, and be a convenient Proviſion for our Families, in the rank God hath placed

Vol. III. them, all that is given to us, that we may give it to *others*; and indeed it is not *ours*; we are the *Proprietors* of it in reſpect of Men, but in reſpect of God we are but *Truſtees*, and *Stewards*, and God will require an Account of us how we have diſpoſed of it.

And can there be a more reigning Madneſs among Men, than to take care only to increaſe their Account more and more, by receiving much; whereas our great Care and Concernment ſhould be to clear our Account, by laying out what we receive, according to the Truſt repoſed in us. How much we ſhall receive of the Things of this World, is in the Care and Will of our Maſter; but our Care and Fidelity is ſeen in laying it out as we ought. Among *Men* (ſays one) it is well enough, if a Steward can give an Account of ſo much laid out, and ſo much in Caſh, and upon this he ſhall have his Diſcharge: But we cannot this way clear our Account with *God*; for it is not offering him *his own again* that will ſatisfie him, as we may learn from the Parable of the *Talents*.

So

So that upon the whole Matter, we ſhould be ſo far from envying the Rich, that we ſhould rather envy the Safety and Happineſs of thoſe who are not intruſted with ſuch dangerous Bleſſings, and who are free from the Temptations of a plentiful Fortune, and the Curſe of a *Covetous* Mind, and from the heavy Account of a great Eſtate. Serm. VIII.

I come now, in the laſt place, to make ſome *Application* of this Diſcourſe to our ſelves.

I. Let our Saviour's *Caution* take place with us, let theſe words of his ſink into our Minds, *Take heed and beware of Covetouſneſs.* Our Saviour I told you doubles the *Caution*, that we may double our *Care.* It is a Sin very apt to ſteal upon us, and ſliely to inſinuate it ſelf into us under the ſpecious pretence of Induſtry in our Callings, and a Provident Care of our Families: But however it may be coloured over, it is a great Evil, dangerous to our ſelves, and miſchievous to the World. Now to kill this Vice in

Vol. III. in us, beſides the Conſiderations before-mentioned taken from the *Evil* and *Unreaſonableneſs* of it, I will urge theſe *Three* more.

1. That the Things of this World are uncertain.

2. That our Lives are as uncertain as theſe Things: And,

3. That there is another Life after this.

1. The uncertainty of the Things of this World. This ſhould very much cool our Affections toward them, that after all our Care and Diligence for the obtaining of them, we are not ſure to enjoy them; we may be deprived of them by a thouſand Accidents. This Conſideration *Solomon* urgeth, to take Men off from an over-eager purſuit of theſe Things, *Prov.* 23. 5. *Wilt thou ſet thine eyes upon that which is not? for Riches certainly make to themſelves wings, they flie away as an Eagle towards Heaven.* After we have ſat brooding over an Eſtate many Years,

Years, it may all on a ſudden, before we are aware, take wing, and *flye away like an Eagle towards Heaven*, ſoaring ſuddenly out of our ſight, and never to return again. Serm. VIII.

And the ſame Argument St. *Paul* uſeth, to take off Mens Affections from the World, 1 *Cor.* 7. 31. becauſe *the faſhion of this World paſſeth away.* παράγει τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου. He compares the Things of this World to a *Scene*, which is preſently changed, and vaniſheth almoſt as ſoon as it appears. Now ſeeing theſe Things are ſo uncertain, we ſhould take heed how we fix our Hearts too much upon them; we ſhould not make love to any thing that is ſo Fickle and Inconſtant as this World is. We ſhould be afraid to contract too near and intimate a Friendſhip with any thing which will forſake us, after we have Courted it with ſo much importunity, and purchas'd it with ſo much pains, and endeavour'd to ſecure it with ſo much Caution, and Tenderneſs.

2. Our

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2. Our Lives are as Uncertain as theſe Things. If our Eſtates remain with us, we are continually in danger of being removed from them. And (as one ſays) it is Folly to build our hopes upon a Match, where both Parties are ſo uncertain and inconſtant. Why ſhould we place our deareſt Affections upon Things which we are not ſure to enjoy one Moment? *Thou Fool, this Night ſhall thy Soul be taken from thee, and then whoſe ſhall thoſe things be?* I remember *Seneca* tells us a real Story, juſt anſwerable to the *Rich Man* in the Parable, of an Acquaintance of his, who by long and great Induſtry had arrived to a vaſt Eſtate; and juſt when he began to enjoy it, after one of the firſt good Meals which perhaps he ever made in his Life, that very Night *his Soul was taken from him*, for preſently after Supper he died. *In ipſo actu bene ſedentium rerum, in ipſa procurrentis fortunæ impetu. In the heighth of his Proſperity, and in the full career of his good Fortune.*

But

Serm. VIII.

But if we live to enjoy for any time what we have got, we ſhould remember that our Life is but a paſſage through the World, and that we are but *Pilgrims and Strangers in the World, as all our Fathers were, that we have here no abiding place, no continuing City,* but are travelling towards our own Country. And why ſhould we load our ſelves whilſt we are upon our journey, and cumber our ſelves with thoſe things which will be of no uſe to us there, whither we are a going?

But the great wonder of all is, that this Vice ſhould ſo ſtrongly reign, and even grow upon Men in Old Age, and get ſtrength, as weakneſs creeps upon us. This very Thought *that we are to dye*, ſhould work in us a great indifferency towards the Things of this World. But when Men are convinc'd they cannot live long, and that every Step they take, they are in danger of ſtumbling into the Grave, this one would think ſhould wean our Affections from this World; and yet uſually none take ſo faſt hold of it, and embrace

Vol. III. brace it ſo kindly as Old Men; like Friends, who tho' they know they muſt leave one another, yet are loth to part. Do we not ſee many purſue theſe things with as much eagerneſs and appetite, when they are leaving the World, as if they were to ſtay in it a Hundred Years longer? So that in this ſenſe alſo, they are *Children again*, and are as fond of theſe Toys, as if they were juſt beginning the World, and ſetting out for their whole Life.

3. There is another Life after this, to be ſeriouſly thought on, and provided for with great Care: And did Men firmly believe this, they would not with *Martha*, *buſie themſelvs about many things, but would mind the one thing neceſſary*, and with *Mary chuſe that better part which could not be taken from them.* They would overlook the Trifles of this World, and ſcarce take notice of *the things which are ſeen*, but be only intent upon *the things which are not ſeen; becauſe the things which are ſeen are but Temporal, but the things which are not ſeen are Eternal.* The great Concernments of another World would employ

employ their utmoſt Care, and their beſt Thoughts. Serm. VIII.

Whilſt we are in this World, we ſhould remember that *this is not our home, nor the place of our reſt*; and therefore as Men do in an *Inn*, we ſhould make a ſhift with thoſe indifferent Accommodations which the World will afford us, and which we can have upon eaſie terms, without too much trouble and ſtir, becauſe we are not to continue long here; and in the mean time we ſhould cheer up our ſelves with the thoughts of the Pleaſure and the Plenty of *our Father's Houſe*, and of that full Contentment and Satisfaction which we ſhall meet withal, when we come to thoſe *Everlaſting Habitations*.

So that our great Care ſhould be to provide for Eternity. If we have unbounded Deſires, let us place them upon ſuch Objects as are worthy of them. Let us *earneſtly covet the beſt things*, and ſeek after *the true Riches*. We ſhould ſo mind the World, as to make Heaven our great Care, as to make

make ſure to *provide our ſelves bags that wax not old, a treaſure in the Heavens, that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth,* as our Saviour adviſeth, *Luke* 12. 33. To the ſame purpoſe is the Counſel of St. *Paul*, 1 *Tim.* 6. 17, 18, 19. *Charge them that are Rich in this World, that they be Rich in good works, willing to diſtribute, ready to communicate, laying up for themſelves a good foundation*; or (as the word θεμέλιον may alſo be rendred) *a good treaſure, againſt the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of Eternal Life.*

I have told you that all theſe things will fail in a ſhort ſpace; we ſhall either be ſtripp'd of them, or ſeparated from them when we come to dye, and ſhall look over to that vaſt Eternity which we muſt ſhortly enter upon; this World, and all the Enjoyments of it, will then be as nothing to us, and we ſhall be wholly taken up with the thoughts of another World, and be heartily ſorry that the things of this World have taken up ſo much of our Time and Care, and

that

that the great and weighty Concern- Serm.
ments of all Eternity have been ſo little VIII.
minded and regarded by us. Now
ſeeing all theſe things ſhall be, pardon
me, if I earneſtly beg of you, in the
midſt of all your Worldly Cares, to
have ſome Conſideration for your Im-
mortal Souls, which are no wiſe pro-
vided for by a great Eſtate, but are
deſign'd for Nobler Enjoyments than
this World can afford. When you
are taking care to Feed and Cloath
theſe dying Bodies, remember that
better part of your ſelves which is to
live for ever. Let not all your en-
quiry be, *what ſhall I eat? or what
ſhall I drink? or wherewithal ſhall I
be cloathed?* But ſometimes ask your
ſelves this queſtion, *what ſhall I do to
be ſaved?* I have an Immortal Spi-
rit, it is but fit ſome Care ſhould
be taken of that, to train it up to Eter-
nity, and to make it *fit to be made
partaker of an Inheritance among them
that are ſanctified.*

The firm Belief and ſerious Conſide-
ration of the great Things of another
World cannot ſurely but cool the

VOL. III. heat of our Affections towards theſe dying and periſhing Things, and make us reſolved not to do any thing whereby we may violate the peace of our Conſciences, or forfeit our Intereſt and Happineſs in another World.

II. By way of Remedy againſt this Vice of *Covetouſneſs*, it is good for Men to be contented with their Condition. This the Apoſtle preſcribes as the beſt Cure of this Vice, *Heb.* 13. 5. *Let your converſation be without Covetouſneſs, and be content with ſuch things as ye have*; ἀρκούμενοι τοῖς παροῦσιν, being contented with the preſent, and thinking that ſufficient. A *Covetous* Man cannot enjoy the preſent, for fear of the future; either out of fear that he ſhall come to want, or out of a ſickneſs and uneaſineſs of Mind, which makes that nothing pleaſeth him: But if we could bring our Minds to our Condition, and be contented with what we have, we ſhould not be ſo eager and impatient after more.

This

Serm. VIII.

This Contentedneſs with our preſent Condition doth not hinder, but that Men by Providence, and Induſtry, and lawful Endeavours, may lay the Foundation of a more plentiful Fortune than they have at preſent. For provided a Man uſe no indirect and diſhoneſt ways to increaſe his Eſtate, and do not torment himſelf with anxious Cares, do neither make himſelf guilty, nor miſerable, that he may be Rich; provided he do not neglect better things, to attain theſe; and have not an inſatiable Appetite towards them; provided he do not Idolize his Eſtate, and ſet his Heart upon theſe things; and if he can find in his heart to enjoy them himſelf, and to be Charitable to others; nothing hinders but that he may be contented with his preſent Condition, and yet take all fair Opportunities which the Providence of God puts into his hands of enlarging his Fortune. It is a good Character which the Poet gives of *Ariſtippus*,

Omnis Ariſtippum decuit color, & ſtatus & res;

VOL. III. *Tentantem majora, ferè præsentibus æquum,*

"Every State and Condition became "him; for tho' he endeavoured after "more, yet his Mind was always in a "manner equal to his present Condition.

But if a Man be discontented with the present, and restless because he hath no more, the whole World will not satisfie him; and if God should raise him from one step to another, he would never think his Fortune high enough, and in every degree of it would be as little contented as he was at first. Our Saviour represents this sort of Men by the *Rich Man* here in the Parable, who when his Barns were full, and ready to crack, his Mind was not fill'd; therefore he pulls them down, and builds greater; and if he had lived 'till these had been full, they must have gon down too, and he would still have built greater. So that tho' he designed when he had raised his Estate to such a pitch, to have sat down, and taken his ease, yet his *Covetous* humour would have been

been ſtirring again, and ſtill have ſtept in between him and Contentment, and for ever have hindred him from arriving at it. Serm. VIII.

III. By way of Direction, I would perſwade thoſe who are Rich, to be Charitable with what they have. If God have bleſt us with abundance, and we would not be like this *Rich Man* here in the Parable, we muſt lay out of our Eſtates, in ways of Piety and Charity, for the Publick Good, and for the private Relief of thoſe who are in want; for that is the ἀποδοσις, or Moral of the Parable; *ſo is he* that *layeth up Treaſures for himſelf, and is not Rich toward God.* So ſhall he be; ſuch an iſſue of his Folly may every one expect, (to be taken away from his Eſtate before he comes to enjoy it) *who layeth up Treaſures for himſelf, but is not Rich toward God*; but does not lay up Riches with God. How is that? By Works of Mercy, and Charity. This our Saviour calls *laying up for our ſelves Treaſure in Heaven*, *Mat.* 16. 20. And at the 33d Verſe of

this Chapter, he calls giving of Alms, *providing for our selves baggs which wax not old, a Treasure in the Heavens which faileth not*; they who do thus, who *are Rich in good Works, ready to Distribute, willing to Communicate*, are said to *lay up for themselves a good Treasure against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold on Eternal Life*, 1 Tim. 6. 18, 19. *Extra fortunam est quicquid donatur*; "whatsoever "we give to the Poor is safely dispo- "sed, and put out of the reach of "Fortune, because it is laid up in Heaven, where we may expect the return and recompence of it. Charity to our poor Brethren is a certain way of transmitting our Riches into the other World, to make way for our reception there. So our Lord tells us, *Luke* 16. 9. *I say unto you, make to your selves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail* (that is) when ye shall leave this World, and the enjoyments of it, *they may receive you into Everlasting Habitations.*

Serm. VIII.

At the Great Day of Judgment, when we ſhall appear before God, and, according to our Saviour's Repreſentation of the Proceedings of that Day, ſhall hear them thus Expoſtulating with Men, *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirſty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye cloathed me not; ſick, and in priſon, and ye viſited me not*; what would we then give, how much of our Eſtates, if we had them then at our Command, would we not be willing to part withal, to have that Comfortable Sentence paſt upon us; *Come ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the World!* But if we be found among thoſe who would ſpare nothing out of their abundance to any Charitable Uſe and Purpoſe, I have not the heart to tell you how miſerable the Condition of ſuch Perſons will be, and how dreadful a Doom will be paſſed upon them.

It is a ſad Conſideration, that there are ſome Perſons in the World, who

seem to be only defective in this Duty; like the Young Man in the Gospel, who lacked but *this one thing* to make him perfect; *he had kept the Commandments from his youth,* and preserved himself from those gross Sins which the Law did plainly forbid; and yet for want of *this one thing* he parted from his Saviour, and, for any thing we know, fell short of Eternal Life. There are many who are very Devout and Religious, much in Prayer and Fasting, and all the other frugal Exercises of Piety, which cost them no Money; but yet are very defective in Alms, and Charity, which in Scripture are so frequently joyn'd with the Fastings and Prayers of good Men; and by this means, all their Devotion and Diligence in the other Parts of Religion is lost, and will not bring them to Heaven. And is it not great pity, that they who *are not far from the Kingdom of God, should fall short of it?* that they, who in most other things bid so fair for Heaven, should break with God upon this single Point?

I know

o I know Men have ſeveral ways to deceive their own Hearts, and to defend themſelves againſt all theſe Aſſaults. Serm. VIII.

Firſt, They ſay, they are injurious to no Man, in not being Charitable. And 'tis true, that in Humane Courts the Poor can have no Action againſt the Rich for want of Charity to them; but yet for all that, they do injurioſly detain that which doth not of Right belong to them. They are Cruel and Hard-hearted, and they are guilty of high breach of Truſt, in reſpect of God, whoſe Stewards they are, and who hath dealt ſo liberally with them in the Things of this Life, on purpoſe to oblige them to be ſo to others. That which thou ſtoreſt up, without regard to the neceſſities of others, is unlawfully detained by thee, ſince God intended it ſhould have been for *Bread to the hungry*, and *Cloaths to the naked*, and for help and relief *of thoſe who are ready to periſh*. For why art thou Rich, and another Poor? But that thou mighteſt exerciſe thy Charity upon thoſe fitting Objects which the Providence of God preſents to thee. It had been eaſie for God (ſince

(ſince *the Earth is his, and the fulneſs thereof*) ſo to have contrived Things, that every Man ſhould have had a ſufficiency, and have been in a moderate Condition; but then a great many Virtues would have been ſhut out of the World, and loſt, for want of opportunity to exerciſe them. Where then had been the Poor Man's Patience, and the Rich Man's Pity? and the contentedneſs of Men of moderate Fortune?

Secondly, Men ſay that they have Children to provide for. And do ſo in God's Name, for he allows us to do it liberally; but unleſs their Condition and Wealth ſet them above an ordinary Calling, do not chuſe ſo to provide for them, as to take them off from all Employment, leſt you put them in the ready way to be undone; have a Care of leaving them no other buſineſs, but to ſpend what you have left them; if you do ſo, they will in all probability do that work very effectually, and make as much haſte to be Poor, as you did to make them Rich. If Men could but be contented to do that which is beſt

beſt for their Children, they might do a great deal better for themſelves, by diſpoſing what they have to ſpare in Charity. Serm. VIII.

Thirdly, Others would fain excuſe themſelves from this Duty at preſent, by telling what they intend to do when they come to Die, that is, when they can keep what they have no longer. It ſeems then thou wilt leave it to thy Executor to do good in thy ſtead. This ſhews thou haſt no great heart to the buſineſs, when thou deferreſt it as long as ever thou canſt. But why wilt thou truſt another with the diſpoſal of thy Charity, rather than thy ſelf? This is hardly to offer either a *Reaſonable*, or a *Living Sacrifice to God*, to do good only when we are dead. It is well that God hath made all Men Mortal, and that *it is appointed for all Men once to die*; otherwiſe ſome Men would never do good at all.

Wherefore ſetting aſide theſe, and all other excuſes, which will not be admitted, nor will any of us have the face

face to plead them at the Day of Judgment; I ſay, ſetting aſide all Excuſes whatſoever, let us reſolve to do good with what we have whilſt we can; and to that end let us lay aſide ſome Portion of what God has bleſt us withal, for the uſes of Piety, and Charity, and let it bear ſome decent Proportion to what God hath given us.

There is never want of proper Objects for our largeſt Charity, and now leſs than ever. Beſides thoſe at home, which preſent themſelves to us in great numbers every day, God hath ſent us many from abroad, who call loud upon us for our pity and help, both as they are reduced to the greateſt extremity, and are Sufferers in the beſt Cauſe, that of our common Religion, which ought now to be dearer to us than ever. Let us ſhew Mercy now, as we expect Mercy from others, in any day of our diſtreſs in this World, and as ever we hope, when ever we come to appear before the Judgment Seat of Chriſt, *to find Mercy with the Lord in that Day.*

Conſider

Consider what I have said upon this Argument, and let this extraordinary kind of Caution, which our Saviour here gives, make a deep impression upon your Minds; *Take heed and beware of Covetousness; for a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance if the things which he possesseth.* Serm. VIII.

SERM-

SERMON IX.

Religion, our firſt and great Concernment.

MATTH. VI. 33.

But ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.

IN the latter part of this Chapter, our Saviour doth in a long Diſcourſe caution his Diſciples againſt an Inordinate Care about the Things of this Life, which he concludes with a ſtrict Charge to make Religion their firſt and great Concernment, and above all Things to take Care to ſecure

cure to themſelves the happineſs of another Life; *But ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, &c. In the handling of which words, I ſhall do theſe *Four* Things.

Firſt, I ſhall explain what is here meant by *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs.*

Secondly, What by *ſeeking* of theſe.

Thirdly, I ſhall lay down ſome neceſſary and plain Directions, which if we obſerve, we cannot miſcarry in this matter.

Fourthly, I ſhall ſet before you ſome of the moſt proper and powerful Motives and Encouragements to the minding of this great Intereſt and Concernment; among which, I ſhall particularly conſider the Argument or Encouragement here uſed in the Text, *and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.*

Firſt, I ſhall explain to you what is here meant by *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs.*

Firſt,

Serm. IX.

I. What is meant by *the Kingdom of God.* And there are two Famous acceptations of this Phraſe, and both of them very frequent in the New Teſtament. Sometimes it is uſed to ſignifie the State of the Goſpel, or the Chriſtian Religion, which by the *Jews* was called *the Kingdom of God*, or *the Kingdom of the Meſſias*, Mark 1. 15. *The Kingdom of God is at hand*; that is, the State or Diſpenſation of the Goſpel is now approaching, and ready to take place. *Luke* 17. 20. The *Phariſees* demanding of our Saviour *when the Kingdom of God ſhould come*, that is, when the Reign of the *Meſſias* ſhould commence; he anſwers them, *the Kingdom of God cometh not with obſervation*; that is, not with any Temporal Pomp and Splendor, ſo as to draw the eyes of People after it, as the *Jews* did vainly imagine; but *the Kingdom of God*, ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστιν, *is among you*; not *within you*, as our Tranſlation hath improperly rendred it; *the Kingdom of God* (he tells them) is already come unto you, the *Meſſias* is among you, and ye are not

aware of him. In the like ſenſe this Phraſe is uſed, *Mat.* 21. 43. *The Kingdom of* God (that is, the Goſpel) *ſhall be taken from you*, and *given to a Nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* And ſo likewiſe the Phraſe of *the Kingdom of Heaven* is uſed, *Mat.* 11.11. where ſpeaking of *John* the Baptiſt, our Saviour ſaith, that *among them that were born of Women, there hath not riſen a greater than John the Baptiſt*, that is, there was no greater Perſon than he, under the *Jewiſh* Diſpenſation, *and yet he that is leaſt in the Kingdom of Heaven*, that is, under the Diſpenſation of the Gopel, *is greater than he.*

Now tho' this ſenſe of *the Kingdom of God* be not wholly excluded in the Text, yet there is another ſenſe of this Phraſe very uſual likewiſe in the Scripture, and which is more agreeable to the ſcope of our Saviour's Argument and Diſcourſe, and ſo it ſignifies that future State of Happineſs and Glory which good Men ſhall be advanced to in another World, in oppoſition to this Life, and the Enjoyments

ments of it, which our Saviour had before forbidden his Diſciples to be ſo ſolicitous about. *Take ye no thought, ſaying, what ſhall we eat? or what ſhall we drink? or wherewithal ſhall we cloathed?* And then it follows in direct oppoſition to this inordinate and ſolicitous Care about Worldly Things, *but ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs.* That is, be not ſo ſolicitous about the Conveniencies and Neceſſaries of this Life, as about the Happineſs of the other, and the Means to it. And this Senſe of this Phraſe of the Kingdom of God is ſo very frequent in the New Teſtament, that I ſhall not need to give particular Inſtances of it. Serm. IX.

II. What is meant by Righteouſneſs; *ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs. Righteouſneſs*, in the ſtricteſt and moſt proper ſenſe of the Word, ſignifies the particular Virtue of Juſtice; and very frequently in the Old Teſtament it is uſed for Charity to the Poor, or Almſgiving, *Pſal.* 37. 25, 26. *I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not*

ſeen the Righteous forſaken, nor his ſeed begging bread; he is ever merciful, and lendeth; and *Pſal.* 112. 9. *he hath diſperſed, he hath given to the Poor, his Righteouſneſs endureth for ever.* But *Righteouſneſs* in its largeſt and moſt extended ſenſe, comprehends all the Virtues of a good Man; and ſo it ſignifies here in the Text, and in many other places of Scripture.

So that *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, comprehends the whole buſineſs of Religion, our *laſt End*, which is *Eternal Life and Happineſs* in another World; and *the way and means* to this End, which is *Righteouſneſs*, or that Univerſal Goodneſs which God requires of us, and whereof he himſelf is a Pattern and Example to us; for which Reaſon 'tis call'd *his Righteouſneſs*. And in this ſenſe of *our laſt End*, and *the way and means* to it, *the Kingdom of Heaven*, and *Righteouſneſs*, are uſed in another place, even of this Sermon of our Saviour's upon the Mount, *Matth.* 5. 20. *Except your Righteouſneſs ſhall exceed the Righteouſneſs of the Scribes and Phariſees, ye ſhall in no caſe enter*

enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; where *Righteouſneſs* is made the neceſſary Means and Condition of Eternal Life. I proceed in the Serm. IX.

Second Place, to explain what is meant by *ſeeking firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*. And this ſignifies the greateſt intention of mind, and earneſtneſs of endeavour about the buſineſs of Religion, in order to our attaining of Eternal Happineſs; ſuch a ſeriouſneſs and earneſtneſs of endeavour as Earthly-Minded Men uſe about the Things of this World. *For after all theſe things* (ſays our Saviour immediately after the Text,) *do the Gentiles ſeek*; τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητεῖ, which words ſignifie an intenſe Care, and vigorous Endeavour; *but ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*; that is, be ye who profeſs your ſelves Chriſtians, as intent upon the buſineſs of Religion, and the Salvation of your Souls, as the Heathen, who are in a great meaſure ignorant of God and another Life, are about the things of this Life.

And here are Two Things to be Explained.

I. What is here meant by *ſeeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*; And,

II. What by *ſeeking them in the firſt place.*

For the *Firſt:* A ſincere and earneſt *ſeeking of the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, does imply in it theſe Four Things.

1. A fix'd Deſign and Reſolution as to the End; that we do not only propound to our ſelves the Eternal Happineſs and Salvation of our Souls as our chief End, but that we be immoveably fixt upon it, and always have it in our Aim and Deſign; that here we ſet up our Reſolution, if it be poſſible, to be Happy for ever; that we have this End always in our Eye, and be firmly reſolved to do all that we can towards attaining of it.

Not

Serm. IX.

Not that we are obliged always actually to think upon it; but to have it frequently in our Minds, and habitually to intend and deſign it, ſo as to make it the Scope of all our Endeavours and Actions, and that every thing we do be either directly and immediately in order to it, or ſome way or other ſubſervient to this Deſign, or however not inconſiſtent with it; like the term and end of a Man's Journey, towards which the Traveller is continually tending, and hath it always habitually in his Intention, tho' he doth not always think of it every ſtep that he takes, and tho' he be not always directly advancing and moving towards it, yet he never knowingly goes out of the Way. And tho' he bate and lodge by the way, and does many other Things which do not directly ſet him forward, yet they are all ſubſervient to his Journey, or in proſecution of it; or at leaſt no wilful deviations from it. Thus it ſhould be with us, while we are Sojourning in this World; our fix'd Aim and Deſign ſhould be to get to Heaven, and thither we ſhould be

Vol III. continually tending in our Deſires and Endeavours.

And if this Reſolution be deeply rooted and fix'd in our Minds, it will govern all our Actions, and keep them ſteady to their main End. Whereas, if we be uncertain and unreſolv'd upon our great End, and be divided between the Happineſs of the next Life, and the preſent Enjoyments of this, we ſhall be fickle and unſteady in all our Motions. He that hath two Ends, can purſue neither vigorouſly, but while he is moving towards the one, he leans and inclines to the other; and like a Needle between two Loadſtones, is always in a doubtful and trembling Condition; inclines to both, but is conſtant to neither: And this is the meaning of that Aphoriſm of St. *James*, *The double-minded Man is unſtable in all his ways.* He that is unreſolv'd as to his main End, hath two Minds, and can proſecute nothing vigorouſly: But if our Mind be once fix'd and reſolv'd, that will determine and govern all our motions, and inſpire us with Diligence, and

and Zeal, and Perſeverance in the pro- Serm.
ſecution of our End. IX.

2. *Seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs*, implies inceſſant Care and Diligence as to the means; that we make Religion our buſineſs, and exerciſe our ſelves in the Duties of it, both in publick and private, at proper times and ſeaſons, with the ſame ſerioufneſs and application of Mind, as Men do in their Callings and Profeſſions, for the gaining of Wealth and Preferment; eſpecially on the *Lord's-Day*, which God hath taken to himſelf, and ſet apart for the Duties of his Worſhip and Service. Not that we are excuſed from minding Religion at other times; but that thoſe who are preſt and ſtraitned by the neceſſary Cares of this Life, may be ſure to mind it then, and may have no colour of excuſe for the neglect of it at that time, which God hath allotted for that very purpoſe, and which it is unlawful to employ about our Worldly Affairs. God expects that we ſhould ſerve him at other times, that we ſhould live in an habitual ſenſe of him, and (as *Solo-*

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mon expreſſeth it, *Prov.* 23. 17.) *Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long*; ſo as to be careful not to offend or tranſgreſs in any thing, and ſo as to redeem all Opportunities for the exerciſe of Piety, and Devotion; but *this Day* he peremptorily challengeth to himſelf, and expects we ſhould imploy it in his Service, and Dedicate it to Religion, to the Contemplation of God and Heavenly things, and the Care of our Immortal Souls, with the ſame ſeriouſneſs and diligence, as we do upon other days *labour for the bread which periſheth*; and the leſs leiſure we have upon other days for this purpoſe, the more entirely ſhould we Devote and Conſecrate *this Day* to the Purpoſes and Duties of Religion.

Not but that our whole Life, and all the Actions of it, ſhould be under the government of Religion, and directed by the Laws and Rules of it; and it ſhould be our continual Care and Endeavour to pleaſe God in all things, and we ſhould take as much pains, and be as heartily concerned to be good Men, as the Men of the World are to grow Rich and Great in this World; nay ſo much more, by how much it

is

Serm. IX.

is a better and nobler Deſign to improve in Grace and Virtue, than to proſper and thrive in our Temporal Eſtate; and we do not in good earneſt *ſeek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, if this be not our great ſtudy and endeavour, to ſubdue our Luſts, and govern our Paſſions, and, in a word, to reform whatever is amiſs in the inward frame and temper of our Minds, and in our outward Converſation. And indeed nothing does require greater diligence, and attention, and care, than for a Man to become truly and thoroughly good, to be meek and humble, and patient and contented, and reſigned to the Will of God in every Condition; to be peaceable, and charitable, and placable, and ready to forgive; theſe are great and difficult things, and, whatever we think, not the work of a Wiſh, or the effect of a ſudden Reſolution before the receiving of the Holy Sacrament, no nor the fruit of frequent and fervent Prayers, without the hearty concurrence of our own Care and Endeavour, to render our Lives ſuch, as we pray God by his Grace to aſſiſt and enable us to be.

Thirdly,

3. *Seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, does further imply zeal and earneſtneſs in the purſuit of this Deſign: And this is a degree above diligence; for zeal is an ardour and fervency of Mind in the proſecution of a thing for which you are greatly concerned, and which we vehemently deſire to obtain; it is the hotteſt and moſt intenſe degree of our affection towards any thing, of our deſire and love, mixt with anger at every thing that ſtands in our way and hinders us from obtaining what we ſeek after; ſuch an heat as Ambition does commonly inſpire Men withal, in the purſuit of Power and Preferment. Such ought to be the temper of our Minds, and the edge of our Spirits, in *ſeeking the Kingdom of God*, as does uſually poſſeſs Men in ſeeking the Kingdoms of this World, and the Glory of them. We muſt remember, that it is *a Kingdom* which we ſeek for, and aſpire after, not like the unſtable and tottering Kingdoms of this World, but *a Kingdom which cannot be ſhaken*, as the Apoſtle calls it.

So

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So that the greatneſs of the Deſign, and the Excellency of what we ſeek after, will juſtifie and warrant the higheſt degree of a diſcreet zeal and fervour in the proſecution of it; and therefore no wonder that the Scripture in this matter uſeth words that import the greateſt vehemency, and earneſtneſs, bidding us *to ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate, to labour and watch, to run, and wreſtle, and fight*, and, in a word, *to give all diligence, to make our Calling and Election ſure.*

Laſtly, *Seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, does imply patience and perſeverance in our endeavours after them, and that we never ceaſe our purſuit of them, 'till we have obtained them; and this, notwithſtanding all the difficulties and diſcouragements, the oppoſition and perſecution that we meet with *for Righteouſneſs ſake:* For this we muſt expect, and reckon upon before-hand, to encounter many difficulties, and find many diſcouragements in the ways of Religion; for *ſtrait is the gate, and narrow*

narrow is the way that leads to life, as our Lord himself hath told us: Nay we must count to be grievously *persecuted for Righeousness sake*, and, if God see it good for us, *to pass through many Tribulations*, before we shall enter *into the Kingdom of God*; and therefore we had need to be armed with a great deal of Patience, and a very firm and obstinate Resolution, to enable us to bear up, and to hold out against all these; for this is a necessary qualification for our *seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*. So our Lord hath told us, *Mat.* 10. 22, *he that endureth to the end, shall be saved*; if we *hope to receive the Crown of Life*, we must *be faithful to the death*, *Rev.* 2. 10. And to the same purpose St. *Paul* declares, *Rom.* 2. 7. that they only shall be made partakers of *Eternal Life*, *who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality.*

You see what is meant by *seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; it remains briefly to be shewn, in the *Second* place, what is meant by *seeking these first*; *seek ye first the Kingdom of God*,

Serm. IX.

God, and his Righteouſneſs; that is, let this be your main and principal Deſign, ſo as to take place of all others in your eſteem and affections, in your aim and endeavour; in compariſon of this, mind nothing elſe, not the Comforts and Conveniencies, no not the Neceſſaries of Life, *what ye ſhall eat, and what ye ſhall drink, and wherewithal ye ſhall be clothed.* Theſe you ſee our Saviour inſtanceth in before the Text, as not to be regarded and taken care of, when they come in competition with *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs.* And our Saviour tells us elſewhere, that not only none of the Comforts and Neceſſaries of Life are to be valued againſt him, and his Religion; but that even this Temporal Life it ſelf, as dear as it is to us, is to be parted withall, and given up, rather than to quit the profeſſion of his Truth and Religion, *Mat.* 10. 37, 38. *He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.* He inſtanceth in the neareſt Relations, thoſe towards whom we have the moſt tender and

and relenting affections, and yet he tells us, that the Conſideration of his Truth and Religion ought to take place of theſe, nay even of Life it ſelf; for ſo it follows, and *he that taketh not his Croſs, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* St. *Luke* expreſſeth it more ſtrongly and vehemently, *Luke* 14. 26. *If any Man come to me* (that is, take upon him the profeſſion of my Religion) *and hate not his Father, and Mother, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Siſters, yea, and his own life alſo, he cannot be my Diſciple.* When theſe come in competition with our Religion, and the great intereſt of our Eternal Salvation, we are to regard and value them no more than if they were the Objects of our hatred, but to ſet aſide all conſideration of affection to them, ſo far as it would tempt us from Conſtancy in our Religion, and the Care of our Souls.

So that when our Saviour bids us *firſt to ſeek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, his meaning is, that Religion, and the Concernments of our Souls, and the Eternal Happineſs of

of them in another World, ſhould be our firſt and chief Care; and that all other things ſhould be made ſubordinate and ſubſervient to this great Deſign, and be no further minded by us, than they really are ſo: For that which is our great End, will ſubdue all other things, and bring them into ſubjection to it, and will reject them, and throw them aſide, if they be inconſiſtent with it. If Heaven be our utmoſt aim, and in order to that, it be our great ſtudy and endeavour to be Righteous, and Holy, this Reſolution and Deſign, ſincerely entertained, will over-ule all other Conſiderations, and make all the things of this World to ſtoop and give way to that which is our chief End, the Eternal Happineſs and Salvation of our Souls. And thus I have done with the *Second* Thing I propoſed, namely, what is meant by *ſeeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*; and what by *ſeeking them firſt.* Serm. IX.

I proceed in the *Third* place, to lay down ſome plain Rules for our Dire-

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I proceed in the *Third* place, to lay down ſome plain Rules for our Direction

Vol. III. ction and Furtherance in *ſeeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*; that is, in the great Buſineſs of Religion.

Firſt, Let us always live under a lively and powerful Senſe of another World; that we are placed here in this World, but for a little while, and *that* wholly in order to our preparation for a better and a happier Life. Let this Thought be often in our Minds. That Eternity is the moſt conſiderable duration, and the next World the Place of our Everlaſting abode, where we muſt dwell and continue for ever; and therefore our preſent State is but of little Moment and Conſideration to us, but only in order to our future and Everlaſting Condition. We may pleaſe our ſelves here for a little while with Toys, and Trifles, with Dreams and Shadows of Pleaſure and Happineſs, and may be exerciſed with ſome Troubles and Afflictions for a ſhort ſpace, *for a moment* (as the Apoſtle calls it, *our light afflictions which are but for a moment*, and ſo indeed it is, compared with all Eternity; but the

the ſubſtantial and durable Happineſs or Miſery remain for Men in the other World, and will certainly be their portion, according as they have demeaned themſelves in this World. Serm. IX.

Now the ſerious Conſideration of this cannot fail to put us upon vigorous Preparations for another World, and to make us wholly intent upon our Eternal Concernments, and to reſolve whatever becomes of us in this World, to take effectual Care that we may be Happy for ever. He that firmly believes the Immortality of his Soul, and a Life after Death, which will never have an end, muſt needs take into Conſideration his whole Duration, and bend all his Care and Thoughts, how he may avoid the greateſt and moſt laſting Miſery, and ſecure to himſelf an Immortality of Bliſs and Happineſs.

Secondly, Let us be always under a Conviction of the abſolute and indiſpenſable neceſſity of Holineſs and Righteouſneſs, as the only way and means whereby the Kingdom of God is

to be attained, and that Holineſs and Happineſs are not to be ſeparated, the one being a neceſſary Condition and Qualification for the other; and conſequently, that it is the vaineſt thing in the World for any Man to hope to enter into *the Kingdom of God*, without endeavouring after *his Righteouſneſs*; there is ſo ſtrong a connexion between them, that a Man may as reaſonably expect to be well and at eaſe without Health, as to be Happy without Holineſs; for this makes us like to God, and our Likeneſs and Conformity to God is that alone which can make us capable of the bleſſed Sight and Enjoyment of God. We muſt be *Partakers of a Divine Nature*, in order to our participation of the Divine Bleſſedneſs. And the Conſideration of this will effectually engage us to *ſeek the Righteouſneſs of God*, without which we ſhall never enter into *his Kingdom*; and *to follow Holineſs, without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord.*

Thirdly, Let us always remember that *Righteouſneſs* is of a great extent, and comprehends in it all goodneſs; it takes

takes in all the Duties of Religion, and the Practice of all of them; it is a Complication of all Graces and Virtues, of all the Parts and Ingredients, of all the Duties and Offices of a good Man. To denominate a Man *Righteous*, all Cauſes muſt concur; all the Eſſential Principles and Parts of Religion and Goodneſs muſt meet together; Knowledge and Practice, Faith and Good Works, Right Opinions and Real Virtues, an Orthodox Profeſſion and a Holy Life, abſtaining from Sin and doing of Righteouſneſs, Purity of Heart and Unſpotted Manners, Godlineſs and Honeſty, the Bridling of our Tongue, and the Government of our Paſſions, and *above all things Charity, which is the Band of Perfection.* Serm. IX.

For *Righteouſneſs* is our Conformity to the Law of God, as *Unrighteouſneſs* and Sin is the Tranſgreſſion of it: Now this, if it be real and ſincere, will be uniform, and univerſal, equally reſpecting all the Laws of God, and every part of our known Duty, and will not content it ſelf with an eſpe-

cial regard to one or two Precepts of the Law, tho' never ſo conſiderable, and then allow it ſelf in the neglect and violation of the reſt; no nor with the obſervation of the Duties of one Table of the Law, if it overlook the other; no nor with Obedience to all the Commandments of God, one only excepted. St. *James* hath put this very Caſe, and determined it, That *he that ſhall keep the whole Law, ſave only that he offend in one point, is guilty of all* that is, he is not ſincere in his Obedience to the reſt: And therefore if we *ſeek the Righteouſneſs of God*, our Righteouſneſs muſt be Univerſal; *as he that hath called us is holy, ſo muſt we be holy in all manner of Converſation*, in the tenor of our Actions, and the whole Courſe of our Lives; and any one Reigning Sin and Vice, any groſs and notorious Defect in the Virtues of a good Life, will ſpoil all our *Righteouſneſs*, and will effectually ſhut us out of *the Kingdom of Heaven*.

Fourthly, Let us wiſely ſubordinate the ſeveral Parts and Duties of Religion to one another, according to the intrin-

intrinſical worth and value of them, that ſo we may mind every part of Religion in its due place, and according to the true nature and importance of it. Knowledge and Faith are in order to Practice, and a good Life; and ſignifie nothing, unleſs they produce that; the means of Religion, ſuch as Prayer and Faſting, diligent Reading and Hearing the Word of God, Reverent and Devout Receiving of the Bleſſed Sacrament, are of leſs account and value, than that which is the End of all theſe, which is to make us inwardly and really good, and *fruitful in all the works of Righteouſneſs, which by Jeſus Chriſt are to the Praiſe and Glory of God.* And therefore the Means of Religion which I have mentioned, are to be regarded and uſed by us, in order to the attaining of theſe Ends, without which they are meer Formality and Hypocriſie, and inſtead of finding acceptance with God, they are *an abomination to him,* and *his Soul hates them.* Serm. IX.

And ſo likewiſe the Circumſtances of Religion are leſs conſiderable than

the ſubſtantial Means and Inſtruments of it. And therefore all Rites and Ceremonies are in Religion of leſs conſideration, than the Subſtance of God's Worſhip, and ought always to be ſubordinate to it. In like manner, the Moral Duties of Religion, comprehended under *the two great Commandments* of *the love of God*, and *our Neighbour*, becauſe they are of Eternal, and indiſpenſable Obligation, are to be preferr'd to matters of meer poſitive Inſtitution; and where they cannot ſtand together, that which is poſitive ought to be ſet aſide, and to give way for the preſent to that which is moral and good in its own Nature, and not only becauſe it is Commanded, and Enjoyned; for in this Caſe God hath expreſly declared that *he will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice.* Upon which ground our Saviour declares, that the Law of the *Sabbath* ought to give place to *works of Mercy.* Upon the ſame account, Peace and Charity are to be valued above Matters of Nicety and Scruple, of doubtful Diſpute and Controverſie; becauſe the former are unqueſtionably good, the latter doubtfully and uncertainly ſo.

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All theſe things ought to be conſidered, and are of great moment to make a Man ſincerely and wiſely Religious. For Men may keep a great ſtir about ſome parts of Religion, and be very Careful and Diligent, Zealous and Earneſt about the Means and Inſtruments of Religion, and in the Exerciſes of Piety and Devotion; and yet be deſtitute of the Power and Life of it, and fall ſhort of that inward, and real, and ſubſtantial *Righteouſneſs*, which alone can qualifie us for *the Kingdom of God.* Serm. IX

The *Fifth* and laſt Direction I would give, is this; That we have a particular regard to the great Duty of Charity, or Alms-giving, this being very frequently in Scripture called *Righteouſneſs*, as being an eminent part of Religion, and a great Evidence of the truth and ſincerity of our Piety. And this our Saviour particulary directs to, as the way to *the Kingdom of God*, *Luke* 12.33. After this general Exhortation, to *ſeek the Kingdom of God*, he inſtanceth in *Charity*, as the direct way to it; *give Alms, provide for your ſelves Bags that wax not old, a Treaſure in the Heavens, that*

that faileth not. And elſewhere our Saviour ſpeaks of this Grace and Virtue, as that which, above all others, will make way for our admiſſion into Heaven, *Luke* 16. 9. *I ſay unto you, make to your ſelves friends of the Mammon of unrighteouſneſs, that when ye fail, they may receive you* (or ye may be received) *into Everlaſting Habitations.* And St. *Paul* calls it, *laying in ſtore for our ſelves a good foundation*; or (as the word may better be rendred in this place) *a good treaſure againſt the time to come, that we may lay hold on Eternal Life,* 1 *Tim.* 6. 19. St. *James* ſpeaks of it, as a main and moſt eſſential part of Religion, and the great Evidence of a true and ſincere Piety, *Jam.* 1. 27. *Pure Religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this; to viſit the Fatherleſs and Widows in their affliction.* Finally, our Lord inſtanceth in this, as the very thing which will admit us into, or ſhut us out of Heaven; by the performance whereof we ſhall be Abſolved, and for the neglect whereof we ſhall be Condemned, in the Judgment of the Great Day, *Mat.* 25. So that this part of Righteouſneſs or Religion ought in

a more eſpecial manner to be regarded by us; becauſe upon the performance or neglect of this Duty, our Eternal Happineſs doth ſo much depend. Serm. IX.

The *Fourth* and laſt Thing only remains to be ſpoken to; which is, to ſet before you the moſt proper and powerful Motives and Incouragements, to the minding of this great Intereſt and Concernment. But this will be the Subject of another Diſcourſe.

SERMON

SERMON X.

Religion, our firſt and great Concernment.

The Second Sermon on

MATTH. VI. 33.

But ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.

THESE Words, which I began to Diſcourſe upon the laſt Day, are a ſtrict Charge and Command to all Chriſtians, to mind the buſineſs of Religion in the firſt place, and to take all imaginable Care to ſecure the Happineſs of another Life; *But ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God, and*

and his Righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you. In the handling of which Argument,

Firſt, I Explained what is meant *by the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs:*

Secondly, I ſhew'd what is meant by *ſeeking* theſe; and what by *ſeeking them firſt.*

Thirdly, I laid down ſome Rules for our Direction and Furtherance in this great Buſineſs.

I ſhall now proceed to repreſent to you, in the

Fourth and laſt place, ſome of the moſt proper and powerful Arguments and Encouragements, to engage us to the minding of this great Intereſt and Concernment; amongſt which, I ſhall in the laſt place particularly conſider the encouragement here given in the Text, *ſeek ye firſt the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs; and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you.*

Serm. X.

First, My First Argument shall be from the Worth and Excellency of the Things we seek, *the Kindom of God, and his Righteousness*; which are certainly the greatest and best Things we can seek. *The Kingdom of God*, is the Eternal Salvation of our Souls, Everlasting Life and Happiness in another World; which, to animate our Endeavours, and to tempt our Ambition the more, are set forth to us under the Notion of a *Kingdom*. And what will not Men do to obtain that? What Pains will they not take? What Hazards will they not run? what Difficulties will they not grapple with, and break through if they can, to come at *a Kingdom?* which when they have obtained, they are exposed to as many, and commonly to more Cares and Fears, to greater Difficulties and Dangers in the keeping, than they were for the getting of it: And yet all this Men will do for *a corruptable Crown*, for one of the petty Kingdoms and Principalities of this World, which are continually tottering, and ready to be overturned by open violence, or to be under-

undermined by ſecret Treachery. But *the Kingdom* which I am ſpeaking of, and perſwading you and my ſelf to ſeek after, is not like the Kingdoms of Men, and of this World; it is called *the Kingdom of God*, to ſignifie to us the Excellency and ſtability of it; as much beyond any of the Kingdoms of this World, as the Heavens are high above the Earth, and as God is greater than Man; *a Kingdom which cannot be ſhaken, a Crown which fadeth not away*, a Scepter which cannot be wreſted from us.

But to quit the Metaphor, and ſpeak to the Thing; *the Kingdom of God* imports the Eternal Salvation of our Souls; I ſay of our *Souls*, which both in reſpect of the Dignity of their Nature, and their Immortal duration, are infinitely more valuable than any of the periſhing things of this World, and ought to be much dearer to us. Other things are without us, they neither conſtitute our Being, nor are eſſential to our Happineſs; but our Souls are our ſelves, and the loſs of them is our utter ruine and deſtruction. So that nothing is to be regarded

regarded by us with equal Care and Concernment as the Salvation of our Immortal Souls; that is, that we may be reſcued from Eternal Miſery, and Everlaſtingly Happy in another World. And can we be at too much coſt and pains upon ſuch a deſign, to eſcape ſo diſmal a Condition, ſo dreadful a ruin, as that of Body and Soul to all Eternity? Can any Man be concerned enough to bring about ſo great a good to himſelf? or, can he purchaſe it too dear, whatever he give or part with for it? a good ſo deſirable and ſo durable, as our being Happy for ever. When we purchaſe the things of this World, the Riches and Honours of it, at the expence of ſo much Time, and Care, and Trouble, we pay dear for Trifles and Fancies; but Eternal Happineſs is a Jewel of ſo ineſtimable a Price, that a Wiſe Merchant will have it at any rate, and *ſell all that he hath to purchaſe it.* Serm. X.

Of ſuch value is *the Kingdom of God*; and next to it is *Righteouſneſs*, which is the only Way and Means whereby this *Kingdom* is to be attained, and

Vol. III. therefore to be ſought by us with the greateſt diligence and earneſtneſs: For that which is the only Means to a great and deſirable End, and which alone can make us capable of that End, and which in truth is a degree of it, is valuable next to the End, and almoſt equally with it; and ſuch is *Righteouſneſs*, in Reſpect of *the Kingdom of God*; it is the only means to it, it is that alone which qualifies us, and makes us capable of Happineſs; nay, it is an eſſential ingredient into it, and that which does in a great meaſure conſtitute the Happineſs of Heaven: For that temper of Mind, that Conformity and likeneſs to God, which Holineſs and Righteouſneſs brings us to, is the true Foundation of our Happineſs, and according to the beſt apprehenſions we have now of it, is the very formal Cauſe and Eſſence of our Bleſſedneſs. So St. *John* tells us, 1 *Joh.* 3. 2. *It doth not yet appear what we ſhall be; but we know that when he ſhall appear, we ſhall be like him*; that is, we, do not now diſtinctly underſtand wherein the Happineſs of the next Life conſiſts, we are not able to frame a clear and perfect

perfect Idea of it; but this we know in general, that it consists in our likeness to God, in a conformity to the Moral Perfections of the Divine Nature, which are expresst by the name of *Purity* and *Holiness*; and therefore every one that hopes for the Happiness of Heaven, must endeavour after Holiness; *every Man that hath this hope in him, must purifie himself, even as he is pure.* Serm. X.

So that the things which I am pressing you to seek after, are most effectually recommended, by telling you what they are; *the Kingdom of God* is Eternal Life and happiness, and *his Righteousness* is Universal Holiness and Goodness, without which no Man is qualified for this Blessed State. Now if there be any thing better than Goodness, any thing more desirable than a Happiness which hath no bounds, nor no End; do not mind them, nor look after them: But if there be not: then certainly these are worthy of the Care and Endeavour of our whole Life.

Secondly, Another Conſideration that ſhould very much excite and quicken our Endeavour and Diligence in ſeeking theſe things, is the difficulty of obtaining them. This I confeſs is no Encouragement, but it is a very good Motive and Argument to whet our induſtry in ſeeking theſe things, when we plainly ſee that they are not to be had upon other terms. And this Conſideration our Saviour uſeth to quicken us to *ſtrive* and to contend earneſtly for Eternal Life, *Matth.* 7. 14. *becauſe ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to Life, and few there be that find it:* And *Luke* 13. 24. *Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate; for many I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.*

Seeking here, in oppoſition to *ſtriving*, is a faint and weak Endeavour, which will not carry us through this narrow and difficult paſſage; and this is the reaſon why many miſcarry, who make ſome attempts towards Heaven; but they do not *ſtrive*, they do not put forth

forth any vigorous Endeavours to get thither. Serm. X.

Now the difficulty of attaining Eternal Happineſs, ariſeth from the difficulty of the Way and Means to it; and it is therefore hard to attain *the Kingdom of God*, becauſe it is hard to attain *his Righteouſneſs*. As deſirable as it is, it muſt be acknowledged very difficult for a Man to raiſe himſelf to that temper and diſpoſition of Mind, ſo to ſubdue his Luſts, and govern his Paſſions, to bridle his Tongue, and order all the Actions of his Life, as is neceſſary to qualifie him for Happineſs, and to make him fit to be admitted into *the Kingdom of God*.

And this difficulty is chiefly in our ſelves, but greatly increaſed by temptation and oppoſition from without: Chiefly I ſay in our ſelves, from the ſtrong Biaſs of our Evil and Corrupt Inclinations, and the ſtrong power of vicious Habits and Cuſtoms, which when they are grown inveterate, do Tyrannize over us, and make us perfect Slaves, and lead us Captive at their

pleasure; so that our Nature must be quite changed, and as the Apostle expresseth it, we must be *renewed in the Spirit of our Minds*, our Souls must be new moulded and fashioned, we must be as it were *Created* and *Born again*, before we can *enter into the Kingdom of God*. In this our Saviour is positive and peremptory, *Joh.* 3. 3. *verily verily I say unto you, Except a Man be born again he cannot see the Kindom of God.* This difficulty indeed is greatest at first, but it is considerable afterwards, 'till a through Change be made, and new Inclinations planted in us, and the contrary Habits of Grace and Virtue be super-induced.

And that which increaseth the difficulty is outward Temptation and Opposition from the World, and the Devil; which to withstand and resist, requires great Courage and Resolution, great Watchfulness and Guard over our selves. But yet for our Comfort, these Difficulties are not insuperable to that Grace and Assistance, which God is always ready to afford to us upon so good an Occasion, and to so good a purpose;

greater

greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World. And this I am ſure is Matter of great incouragement to us, that tho' the difficulty of *working out our Salvation* be great, yet if we do in good earneſt ſet about it, God is ready to aſſiſt and ſecond our ſincere Endeavours, *to work in us both to will and to do of his own goodneſs*, and ſo to prevent us with his gracious Favour, and to further us with his continual Aid, that finally by his Mercy we may obtain Eternal Life. Serm. X.

Thirdly, Another powerful Argument to Care and Diligence, is the fatal Danger of Miſcarriage in a Matter of ſo great Concernment. We may do many things in Religion, and take ſome pains to get to Heaven, and yet fall ſhort of it. The Rich young Man in the Goſpel, our Saviour tells us, was *not far from the Kingdom of God*, and he broke with our Saviour only upon one Point, he was too much addicted to the World, and loth to part with his great Poſſeſſions, and diſtribute them in Charity to the Poor, and there-

upon he left our Saviour, and for any thing that we find, never returned to him again.

If the World govern and bear ſway in our Hearts, if we *mind Earthly things* firſt, and make theſe our chief Care and Deſign, *the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs* ſhall not *be added unto us*; if we will not mind them *in the firſt place*, they are too good to be Acceſſories.

And if upon any one point we miſcarry, either out of love to the World, or affection to any other Luſt or Vice that we are loth to part withal, our miſcarriage is fatal, and the ruin which we bring upon our ſelves irreparable; for the Soul once loſt, is loſt for ever. If we have neglected the opportunity of *working out our own Salvation*, while we are in this World, it will never return into our power again, Death will ſhut the door againſt us, and we ſhall never *ſee the Kingdom of God*.

Fourthly,

Serm. X.

Fourthly, It is a mighty encouragement to us to consider, that if we sincerely *seek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, there is not only a fair probability of obtaining them, but all the security we can desire. Men may be in good earnest for the things of this World, may love them with all their Hearts and Souls (as we see too many do) and seek them with all their might and strength, and yet after all their Endeavours may be shamefully frustrated and disappointed of their End. There are many Examples of this kind daily before our eyes, and yet Men are not discouraged from seeking these things. A fair probability, nay almost a possibility of attaining them, is enough to a Worldly-Minded Man to drudge and toil for them. Why the same Affection, the same Zeal, the same unwearied Endeavour to serve God, and to save our Souls, would Infallibly bring us to Heaven. It was a sad but true Saying of Cardinal *Wolsey*, when he was leaving the World, "Had I been but "as careful to please God, as I have "been

"been to ſerve my Prince, he would "not have forſaken me now in the "time of my gray hairs.

Nay it is to be hoped, that leſs Diligence and Care about the Concernments of our Souls, and another Life, than many Men uſe about the things of this Life, will ſecure our Eternal Happineſs; or elſe it is to be feared, that but very few would be ſaved: And who would not place his Induſtry and Endeavour upon a Deſign in which he is ſure not to miſcarry, if he do but heartily and in good earneſt purſue it? Eſpecially when it will be of infinite greater advantage to him, than any Deſign he can propound to himſelf for this World. If a Man may be certainly Happy for Ever, upon the ſame, or eaſier terms, than he can ordinarily compaſs any of thoſe little Deſigns which Men propoſe to themſelves in this World, who would not ſeek that which is moſt worthy the having, and which he is ſureſt to obtain?

Fifthly,

Serm. X.

Fifthly, and Laſtly, the Encouragement here in the Text is not inconſiderable; that if we *ſeek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs, all theſe things ſhall be added unto us.* This certainly is a very tempting Conſideration; for who would not be glad to reconcile the enjoyment of this World with the hopes of Heaven, and Eternal Happineſs? But Men do not generally like our Saviour's Method, they would ſeek the things of this World in the firſt place, and get to Heaven at laſt; they would be content to ſeek the one, and have the other caſt in and conferred upon them, without their ſeeking. But this will not be granted, this way will not do. And yet our Saviour hath gone as far as one would think could in Reaſon be deſired; he hath promiſed that if we will make Religion, and the Salvation of our Souls, our firſt and chief Care, that *all theſe things ſhall be added unto us.* So that the Deſign of going to Heaven, and being Happy for ever, is no ways inconſiſtent with a competent portion of the things of this Life. *Godlineſs*

(the Apoſtle tells us) *hath the promiſe of this Life, and of that which is to come.* The buſineſs of Religion, the practice of a Holy and Virtuous Life, is no hindrance to a Man's thriving in his Temporal Eſtate; nay in many Reſpects it is apt to promote and advance it; by engaging us to diligence in our Calling, and by deriving the bleſſing of God upon our honeſt and lawful Endeavours; by obliging us to the ſtrict and conſtant practice of Truth, and Juſtice, and Fidelity in all our Dealings and Commerce, which are the beſt way to eſtabliſh a clear and ſolid Reputation, and good Eſteem among Men which is an unſpeakable advantage in Buſineſs, and, at the long run, one of the beſt and moſt laſting Inſtruments of Proſperity and Succeſs.

Beſides that Religion frees a Man from thoſe Paſſions and Vices, which do naturally tend to diſſipate and ruin Mens Eſtates; as Intemperance and Lewdneſs, which are every way chargable Vices, and do not only take Men off from Buſineſs, and render them

them unfit for it; but waſte their Eſtates, and bring many other inconveniencies upon their Perſons and Families. Religion makes Men meek and peaceable, and inoffenſive in word and deed, which is a great ſecurity againſt chargeable Suits and Contentions, and all ſorts of Injuries and Affronts from others. Among all the Beatitudes of our Saviour, he only promiſeth Temporal Happineſs to Meekneſs, *Bleſſed are the Meek, for they ſhall inherit the Earth.* They who provoke and offend no body, are likely to be leaſt diſturbed and diſquieted by others in their Poſſeſſion and Enjoyments; *who will harm you* (ſaith the Apoſtle, 1 *Pet.* 3. 13.) *if ye be followers of that which is good?* Some may be ſo perverſe as to perſecute a Man for his goodneſs; but it rarely happens; moſt Men have not only a kindneſs, but a veneration for true goodneſs. Serm. X.

By all theſe ways Religion naturally tends to the Temporal Proſperity of Men, and the promoting of their welfare and happineſs even in this World; beſides that the Providence of

of God is very peculiarly concerned for good Men, and a ſpecial Bleſſing attends them in all their Undertakings. So that excepting the Caſe of Perſecution (which God will particularly Conſider, and Reward in another World) the Religious and good Man, who ſincerely *ſeeks the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, ſtand as fair, and is upon as good terms, for all the lawful Enjoyments of this World, as he that makes it his only Deſign to be Rich and Great in this World; nay as to the neceſſaries of Life, and a competency of outward things, he hath a much greater and better ſecurity from the Providence and Promiſe of God, than the Men of the World have by all their Care and Pains.

Beſides, that he hath this Conſiderable advantage, by minding theſe things only as acceſſories, that if he miſs of them, he hath ſomething better to ſupport him in the want of them; being ſecure of a Happineſs which this World can neither give nor take from him. But now the Worldly Man, if he be defeated in his Deſigns, is

is of all Men moſt miſerable, becauſe he hath nothing elſe to Comfort him, nothing elſe to truſt to; he fails of his hopes as to this World, and hath done what in him lies, to make his Caſe deſperate, as to the other. Serm. X.

Upon all theſe Conſiderations and Encouragements, you ſee how reaſonable it is, that we ſhould make Religion and the Concernments of another Life, our great Care and Buſineſs. And yet how are theſe neglected by the greateſt part of Mankind! And by the beſt of us (God knows) not minded as they ought, and as they deſerve! What can we ſay for our ſelves in excuſe of ſo intolerable a folly? There are two or three things which Men commonly pretend, if not in juſtification, yet in mitigation and excuſe of this great neglect.

Firſt, they pretend great difficulties and diſcouragements in the ways of Religion. This I have already acknowledged to be true, ſo far as to awaken our Care, and to whet our Induſtry; but by no means to make us deſpond, and

and give over all Care of ſo great a Concernment, becauſe of the difficulties it is attended withall. Men who have no mind to a thing, are apt to imagine great difficulties in the attaining of it, and to magnifie them in their fancies beyond Reaſon. As the People of *Iſrael*, when they were to enter into *Canaan* (which was the Type of the Kingdom of Heaven) repreſented the Inhabitants of the Land, whom they were to Conquer, more terrible than in truth they were; reporting to one another, that the Land was full of Giants, and Sons of *Anak*, Men of prodigious Stature, which reached up to Heaven. And this the Wiſe Man obſerves to be the perpetual excuſe of *the Slothful*; when they have no mind to a thing, they ſay *there is a Lyon in the way*; that is, they fancy to themſelves Dangers and Terrors which are not. Thus Men who are averſe from Religion, and have no mind to be at the trouble and pains to get to Heaven, are apt to complain of the monſtrous and inſuperable Difficulties of Religion, and how hard it is for a Man to Mortifie his

his Luſts, and ſubdue his Appetites, and govern his Paſſions, and to do all thoſe Things which are neceſſary to bring him to Heaven. Well! it is acknowledged to be difficult, and is it not ſo to get an Eſtate, and to riſe to any thing in this World? The true Pains which Men take about theſe Things, ſhew that they are Difficult; only when Men have a mind to a thing, and their Heart is ſet upon it, they do not ſtand to complain of the difficulty, but buckle to it, and grapple with it. Serm. X.

Is Religion difficult? And what is not ſo, that is good for any thing? Is not the Law a difficult and crabbed Study? Does it not require great labour, and perpetual drudging to excel in any kind of Knowledge, to be Maſter of any Art or Profeſſion? In a word, is there any thing in the World worthy the having, that is to be gotten without pains? And is Eternal Life and Glory the only ſlight and inconſiderable thing, that is not worth our Care and Induſtry? Is it fit that ſo great a Good ſhould be expoſed to

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the faint and idle Wiſhes, to the cheap and lazy Endeavours of ſloathful Men? For what Reaſon? Nay, with what Conſcience can we bid leſs for Heaven and Eternal Life, than Men are contented to give for the things of this World; things of no value in Compariſon, not worthy the toiling for, not ſure to be attained by all our Endeavours; things which *periſh in the uſing*, and which, when we have them, we are liable to be deprived of by a Thouſand Accidents? One fit of a Fever may ſhatter our Underſtandings, and confound all our Knowledge, and turn us into Fools and Ideots; an Inundation or a Fire may ſweep away and devour our Eſtates; a Succeſſion of Calamities may in a few Hours make the Richeſt and Greateſt Man as Poor as *Job*, and ſet him upon a Dunghill.

But be the Difficulty what it will of attaining *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, they are to be ſought at any rate; becauſe they are abſolutely neceſſary, and we miſerable and undone if we have them not. And therefore

fore not to diſſemble in the Matter, the Difficulties of Religion are conſiderable; but then they are much greater at firſt, and will every Day abate and grow leſs, and the Work by degrees will become eaſie, and turn into Pleaſure and Delight; a Pleaſure ſo great, as none knows but he that hath it; and he that hath it, would not exchange it for all the ſenſual Pleaſures and Enjoyments of this World. Serm. X.

Secondly, Others pretend want of Time for the minding of ſo great a Work. And 'tis very true, that all Perſons have not equal leiſure for this purpoſe; ſome are much more ſtraitned than others, and more taken up with the neceſſary Cares of this Life: But God hath put no Man upon this hard neceſſity, that for want of Time he ſhall be forced to neglect his Body and his Health, his Family and Eſtate, to ſave his Soul. And yet if any Man were brought to this diſtreſs, it were well worth his while to ſecure his Eternal Salvation, tho' it were with the neglect and loſs of all other things. But thoſe who are moſt ſtraitned for

time, have ſo much as is abſolutely neceſſary; for there is a conſiderable part of Religion which does not require Time, but Reſolution and Care: Not to commit Sin, not to break the Laws of God, not to be Intemperate, *to make no proviſion for the fleſh, to fulfil the Luſts thereof*, does not ſpend time, but ſaves it for better Purpoſes; ſo that every Man hath time not to do that which he ought not to do: And for the *poſitive* Part of Religion, whether it conſiſts in the exerciſe of our Minds, or in the External Acts of Religion; no Man is ſo diſtreſt, but he hath time to think of Heaven, and Eternity; time to love God, to eſteem him, and delight in him above all things. And this a Man may do very frequently, and very acceptably, while he is labouring and travelling about his Worldly Affairs; while his Hand is upon the Plow, his Heart may be with God; and while he converſeth here upon Earth, his Thoughts and Affections may be in Heaven. Every Man hath time to pray to God every Day, for his Mercy and Forgiveneſs, for his Grace and Aſſiſtance,

ance, for his Preſervation and Support, and to thank him heartily for all his Bleſſings and Benefits. And a little time ſeriouſly employed in this kind, would have the ſame acceptance with God, as the more ſolemn and longer Devotions of thoſe who have more leiſure and opportunities for them. To be ſure we have all of us time to ſerve God upon his own Day, and to employ it wholly in the Exerciſes of Piety, and in the Care and Conſideration of our Souls. Serm. X.

But this, when all is ſaid, is the Caſe but of very few; moſt of us have no colour for this Complaint; *non inopes temporis, ſed prodigi ſumus*, (as *Seneca* ſays) "we are not Poor, "but Prodigal of our time, and laviſh "it away profuſely upon Folly and "Vanity. Our Vices and Luſts, our Pleaſures and Diverſions, conſume and divert thoſe precious Hours, which ſhould be imployed to theſe better purpoſes; nay many times Time oppreſſeth us, and is a burthen to us, and lies upon our Hands, and we know not how to get rid of it; and yet we chuſe

rather to let it run waſte, than to beſtow it upon Religion, and the Care of our Souls; inſomuch that I fear this will be the Condition of many, that when they were at a loſs what to do with their Time, and knew not how to ſpend it, they would not lay it out upon that which was beſt and moſt neceſſary; for this ſurely is the very beſt uſe that can be made of Time, to prepare and provide for Eternity.

Thirdly, Others pretend it will be time enough to mind theſe things hereafter. But this (as bad Excuſes ſeldom hang together, and agree with one another) directly contradicts the former pretence, which ſuppoſeth ſo much Time neceſſary, and more than many have to ſpare; and yet now they would make us believe that a very little time will ſuffice for this Work, and that it may be done at any time, even juſt when we are going out of this World. But this, of all other, is the ſtrangeſt Interpretation of *ſeeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs firſt*, to put it off to the very laſt. This ſurely is a greater Error on the other hand, to think

think that the Buſineſs of Religion is ſo quickly to be diſpatched, and that the great Work of our Lives can be crowded into ſo narrow a corner of it, that the time of Sickneſs and Old-age, nay, the Hour of Death, well employ'd to this purpoſe, will be ſufficient. Alas! what can we then do that is good for any thing? that can in Reaſon be thought either acceptable to God, or available for our ſelves? When we have not Senſe and Underſtanding enough to diſpoſe of our Temporal Concernments, and to make our Wills, do we think we ſhall be fit to repent of the Sins and Miſcarriages of our whole Lives, and to make our Peace with God? Every Man muſt not expect to have *Saul*'s Fortune, who when he was wearied with ſeeking his Father's Aſſes, met with a Kingdom. We muſt not think when we are tired with purſuing the Follies and Vanities of this World, to retire into Heaven, and *to ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of God.*

Serm. X.

Our Saviour hath taken care to Caution us againſt this deſperate Folly, by a Parable to this very purpoſe, of the *Fooliſh Virgins*, who having trifled away their time 'till the Bridegroom was coming, and neglected to get *Oyl into their Lamps*, (by which we are to underſtand all thoſe good Preparations and Diſpoſitions which are neceſſary to qualifie us for the Kingdom of God) I ſay, having neglected their Opportunity of getting this *Oyl*, while they were looking after it too late, the Door was ſhut againſt them; they thought to have repaired all at laſt, by borrowing of others, and ſupplying themſelves that way.

And thus many deceive themſelves, hoping to be ſupplied out of another ſtore, when they have no grace and goodneſs of their own; out of the Treaſure of the Church, from the redundant Merit of the Saints, and their Works of Supererrogation? of which ſome believe (I know not for what Reaſon) that there is a great

great ſtock which the *Pope* may diſpoſe of, to ſupply thoſe who have taken no care to get *Oyl into their Lamps.* But I know not for what Reaſon Works of Supererrogation are ſuppoſed; *the Wiſe Virgins* knew not of any Merit they had to ſpare, it was *the Fooliſh Virgins* only that entertained this ſenſeleſs Conceit. I am ſure the Parable inſinuates the quite contrary, that the Beſt and Holieſt Perſons which are repreſented by the *Wiſe Virgins*) have nothing to ſpare for the ſupply of others, who have been careleſs of their Souls; *the Fooliſh ſaid unto the Wiſe, give us of your Oyl, for our Lamps are gone out; but the Wiſe anſwered, ſaying, not ſo, leſt there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that ſell, and buy for your ſelves.* It ſeems they had no works of Supererrogation that they knew of; but they do Ironically ſend them to a Market that was ſet up ſomewhere, and where theſe things were pretended to be Sold; but how they ſped, the Concluſion of the Parable tells us, that whilſt they were running about in great haſte to make this

Serm. X.

this purchaſe of the Merits and good Works of others, *the Bridegroom came*, and the Wiſe Virgins, that were ready, went in with him to the Marriage, and the reſt were ſhut out.

And there are thoſe likewiſe among our ſelves, who having been careleſs to qualifie themſelves for *the Kingdom of God*, hope to be ſupplied out of the Infinite Treaſure of Chriſt's Merits: But this alſo is a vain hope. For tho' there be Merit enough in the Death and Sufferings of Chriſt to ſave all Mankind, yet no Man can lay claim thereto, who does not perform the Condition of the Goſpel.

Others think by ſending for the Miniſter, when the Phyſician hath given them over, to receive in a few Hours ſuch Advice and Direction, as will do their buſineſs, as effectually, as if they had minded Religion all their Lives long; and that a few Devout Prayers ſaid over them when they are juſt imbarking for another World, will, like a Magical wind, immediately waft them over into the Regions of Bliſs and Immortality. But

Serm. IX.

But let us not deceive our ſelves; we may defer the Buſineſs ſo long, 'till we ſhall get nothing by our late application to God, and crying to him *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, but that ſevere Anſwer, *Depart from me, ye workers of Ininuity, I know ye not whence ye are.* If we would not have *this* our Doom, let us *firſt ſeek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, that ſo *having our Fruit unto Holineſs, our End may be Everlaſting Life.*

SERMON

SERMON XI.

The Wiſdom of Religion.

PSAL. CXIX. 96.

I have ſeen an end of all Perfection; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

THis *Pſalm* ſeems to have a great deal more of Poetical Number and Skill in it, than at this diſtance from the Time and Age in which it was written, we can eaſily underſtand: The main Scope and Deſign of it is very plain and obvious; namely, to Magnifie the Law of God, and the obſervation of its Precepts, as that wherein true Religion doth mainly

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ly consist. And indeed if we attentively read and consider it, every part of this *Psalm* does with great variety of Expression, and yet very little difference of the sense, descant upon the same ground, *viz.* The Excellency and Perfection of the Law of God. And the Words of the *Text* seem to be as full and comprehensive of the Sense and Design of the whole *Psalm*, as any one Sentence in it; *I have seen an end of all Perfection, but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.*

These words are variously rendred, and understood by Interpreters, who yet in this variety do very much conspire and agree in the same sense. The *Chaldee* Paraphrase renders the Words thus, *I have seen an end of all things, about which I have employ'd my Care; but thy Commandment is very large.* The *Syriac* Version thus, *I have seen an end of all Regions and Countries* (that is, I have found the Compass of this Habitable World to be finite and limited) *but thy Commandment is of a vast extent.* Others explain it thus, *I have seen an end of all Perfection*; that is, of all the things of this

this World, which Men value and esteem at so high a rate; of all worldly Wisdom and Knowledge, of Wealth and Honour, and Greatness, which do all perish and pass away; *but thy Law is Eternal, and still abideth the same*; or, as the Scripture elsewhere expresseth it, *the word of the Lord endureth for ever.* Serm. XI.

Thy Law; that is, the Rule of our Duty Natural and Revealed; or, in a Word, Religion, which consists in the Knowledge and Practice of the Laws of God, is of greater Perfection than all other things which are so highly valued in this World: For the Perfection of it is Infinite, and of a vast Influence and extent; it reacheth to the whole Man, to the Happiness of Body and Soul; to our whole duration both in this World, and the next, of this Life, and of that which is to come. And this will clearly appear, if we consider the *Reasonableness* and the *Wisdom of Religion*, which consists in the Knowledge of God, and the keeping of his Laws.

First,

Firſt, The *Reaſonableneſs of Religion*, which is able to give a very good account of it ſelf, becauſe it ſettles the Mind of Man upon a firm Baſis, and keeps it from rolling in perpetual uncertainty; whereas Atheiſm and Infidelity wants a ſtable Foundation, it centers no where but in the denial of God and Religion, and yet ſubſtitutes no Principle, no tenable and conſtituent Scheme of things in the place of them; its whole buſineſs is to unravel all things, to unſettle the Mind of Man, and to ſhake all the common Notions and received Principles of Mankind; it bends its whole force to pull down and to deſtroy, but lays no Foundation to build any thing upon, in the ſtead of that which it pulls down.

It runs upon that great Abſurdity which *Ariſtotle* (who was always thought a great Maſter of Reaſon) does every where decry, as a Principle unworthy of a Philoſopher, namely, a progreſs of Cauſes *in Infinitum*, and without End; that this was the Cauſe of

of that, and a third thing of that, and ſo on without end, which amounts to juſt nothing; and finally reſolves an infinite number of Effects into no firſt Cauſe; than which nothing can be more unskilful and bungling, and leſs worthy of a Philoſopher. But this I do not intend at preſent to inſiſt upon, having treated largely on the ſame ſubject upon another * Occaſion. I ſhall therefore proceed in the Serm. XI.

* Vide *Serm.* 1ſt, *of the firſt* Vol. *Publiſhed by the Author.*

Second place, to conſider *the Wiſdom of Religion. The fear of the Lord is Wiſdom*, ſo ſaith the *Pſalmiſt*; it is true Wiſdom indeed, it is *the beginning of Wiſdom, Caput Sapientiæ*, the top and perfection of all Wiſdom. Here true Wiſdom begins, and upon this Foundation it is raiſed and carried on to Perfection; and I ſhall in my following Diſcourſe endeavour to make out theſe *two* things.

Firſt, That true Wiſdom begins and is founded in Religion, in the fear of God, and in the keeping of his Commandments.

VOL. III. *Secondly*, That this is the Perfection of Wiſdom; there is no Wiſdom without this, nor beyond it.

Firſt, True Wiſdom begins and is founded in Religion and the Fear of God, and Regard to his Laws. This is the firſt Principle of Wiſdom, and the Foundation upon which the whole Deſign of our Happineſs is to be built. This is in the firſt place to be ſuppoſed, and to be taken into Conſideration in all the Deſigns and Actions of Men: This is to govern our whole Life, and to have a main influence upon all the Affairs and Concernments of it. As the firſt Principle of Humane Society, and that which is to run thro' the whole frame of it, is the Publick good; this was always to be taken into Conſideration, and to give Law to all Laws and Conſtitutions about it: So Religion is the firſt Principle of Humane Wiſdom, by which all our Actions are to be conducted and govern'd; and all Wiſdom which does not begin here, and lay Religion for its Foundation, is prepoſterous, and begins

begins at the wrong end; and is juſt as if in the forming of Humane Society, every one in the ſettlement of the Conſtitution, and the framing of Laws, ſhould have an eye to his own private and particular advantage, without regard to the Publick Good, which is the great End of Society, and the Rule and Meaſure of Government and Laws, and in the laſt iſſue and reſult of things, the only way to procure the ſettled welfare, and to ſecure the laſting Intereſts of particular Perſons, ſo far as that is conſiſtent with the Publick Good. And it would be a very prepoſterous Policy to go about to found Humane Society upon any other terms, and would certainly end in Miſchief and Confuſion. Serm. XI.

And ſuch is all the Wiſdom of Men, in relation to their true Happineſs, which does not begin with Religion, and lay its Foundation there; which does not take into Conſideration God and his Providence, and a Future State of Rewards and Puniſhments after this Life. All Wiſdom which does not proceed upon a ſuppoſi-

Vol. III. tion of the truth and reality of these Principles, will certainly end in shame and disappointment, in misery and ruin; because it builds a House upon the Sand, which when it comes to be try'd by stress of weather, and assaulted by violent storms, will undoubtedly fall, and the fall of it will be great.

And this Error every Man commits, who pursues Happiness by following his own Inclination, and gratifying his Irregular Desires, without any Consideration of God, and of the restraint which his Laws have laid upon us, not for his own Pleasure, but for our good. For when all things are duly Considered, and all Accounts cast up, it will appear upon a just Calculation of things, that all the restraints which the Laws of God lay upon Men, are highly reasonable, and greatly for their benefit and advantage, and do not abridge us of any true Pleasure or Happiness; but are Wise and Merciful Provisions of Heaven, to prevent our harm and mischief; so that we are not Wise, if we act without regard

regard to God, and his Laws, and are not willing to be govern'd by him, who loves us better than we do our ſelves, and truly deſigns our Happineſs, and Commands us nothing but what directly tends to it. For the Laws of God are not Arbitrary Conſtitutions, and meer inſtances of Sovereign Will and Power; but Wiſe Rules and Means to procure and advance our Happineſs. Serm. XI.

And in like manner, all that Wiſdom which Men uſe to compaſs their Worldly Deſigns, of Riches, and Greatneſs, without Conſideration of the Providence of God, and Dependance upon it for the Succeſs of our Affairs, is all perfect Folly and Miſtake. For tho' the Deſign be never ſo well laid, and vigorouſly proſecuted, and no Means which Humane Wiſdom can deviſe for the attaining of our End have been omitted by us; yet if we leave God out of the Account, we forget that which is Principal, and ſignifies more to the Succeſs of any Deſign, than all other things put together. For if God fa-

vours our Deſigns, the moſt improbable ſhall take effect; and if he blow upon them, the moſt likely ſhall miſcarry. Whenever he pleaſeth to interpoſe, to croſs the Counſels and Deſigns of Men, *the Race is not to the ſwift, nor the Battle to the ſtrong; neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor riches to men of underſtanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to all.*

So that it is great Folly not to Conſider the Providence of God in all our Deſigns and Undertakings, not to implore his Favour and Bleſſing, without which nothing that we take in hand can proſper. That which is Principal to any Purpoſe, ought to be conſidered in the firſt place, nothing being to be attempted either without or againſt it. And ſuch is the Providence of God in all Humane Affairs; it is more conſiderable to the promoting or hindering of any Event, than all things in the World beſides; and therefore all Policy, which ſets aſide God and his Providence, is vain; be-

cauſe

cauſe *there is no wiſdom, nor underſtanding, nor counſel againſt the Lord.* Serm. XI.

So likewiſe all that Wiſdom which only conſiders and regards this ſhort Life, and the narrow Concernments of it, and makes proviſion only for our welfare in this World; and therefore can only be tempted with the hopes of Temporal Advantages, and terrified only with the danger of Temporal Evils and Sufferings; but hath no ſenſe of an Immortal Spirit within us, no proſpect of a Life after Death, no Conſideration of a Happy or Miſerable Eternity, of Rewards and Puniſhments, infinitely greater than all the Temptations and Terrors of Time and Senſe; I ſay all this is a prepoſterous and pernicious Wiſdom, and proceeds upon a falſe Suppoſition, and a quite contrary Scheme of Things to what really is; and conſequently our whole Life, and all the Deſigns and Actions of it do run upon a perpetual miſtake, and a falſe Stating of our own Caſe; and whatever we do purſuant to this Miſtake is fooliſh and hurtful, and ſo far

Vol. III. from conducing to our true intereſt, that it is all either beſides it, or contrary to it; becauſe we act upon a Suppoſal only of this Life, and a Being only in this World, and that there is nothing either to be feared or hoped for beyond it; and being thus groſly miſtaken, we ſet our hearts only upon Temporal Things, and ſtudy our preſent ſecurity and ſatisfaction, and in all our Counſels and Actions are ſwayed only by the Conſideration of Temporal Good and Evil, of the preſent Eaſe and Pleaſure, the Diſturbance and Pain of our Fleſhly and Senſual Parts; without any ſenſe of our own Immortality, and of that Everlaſting State which remains for us in another World.

But there is (my Brethren) moſt certainly there is another Life after this; we are not *Beaſts*, if we do not make our ſelves ſo; and if we die, we ſhall not die like them, neither ſhall our laſt End be like theirs. For whatever we may think or wiſh, it will not be in our power to extinguiſh our own Beings when we have

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a mind to be rid of them, and to chuſe whether or no we ſhall live for ever. Serm. XI.

And if this be a falſe Scheme of Things which we have framed to our ſelves, and proceeded upon (as undoubtedly it is) then our whole Life is one great Error, and a perpetual Miſtake, and we are quite wrong in all that we deſign to do. Our Wiſdom hath begun at the wrong end, and we have made a falſe Calculation and Account of Things, and have put our Caſe otherwiſe than it is; and the farther we proceed upon this Miſtake, our Miſcarriage will be ſo much the more fatal in the iſſue. But if our Wiſdom begin at the right end, and our Caſe be truly ſtated, that God hath put into theſe frail and mortal Bodies of ours, Immortal Spirits that ſhall live for ever; and hath ſent us into this World to ſojourn here for a little while, and to be Diſciplin'd and Train'd up for Eternity; and that after a ſhort proof and trial of our Obedience, we ſhall be tranſlated into an Everlaſting State of unſpeakable Happi-

Happineſs or Miſery, according as we have demeaned our ſelves in this World; if we believe this to be truly our Caſe, our Intereſt is then plainly before us, and we ſee where our Happineſs lies, and what remains for us to do, in order to the obtaining of it, and what we are to expect to ſuffer, if we do it not.

Now this Foundation being laid, it is evident, that the beſt thing we can do for our ſelves, is to provide for our Future State, and to ſecure the Everlaſting Happineſs of another Life. And the beſt way to do that is to live in obedience to thoſe Laws which our Maker, and our Sovereign hath preſcribed to us; and according to which he will one Day Sentence us to Eternal Rewards or Puniſhments.

It is evidenr likewiſe, that all our ſenſual Appetites and Deſires are to be bounded by the Rules of Reaſon and Virtue, which are the Laws of God; and that no preſent Eaſe and Pleaſure, Trouble and Suffering, are to

to be conſidered and regarded by us, in competition with the things which are Eternal; and that Sin is of all other the greateſt Evil, and moſt miſchievous to our main Intereſt, and therefore with all poſſible Care to be avoided; and that the Favour of God is to be ſought, and the Salvation of our Souls to be provided for at any Pains and Expence whatſoever, and even with the hazard and loſs of our deareſt Intereſts in this World, yea and of Life it ſelf. Serm. XI.

And now if this Matter hath been rightly ſtated, then Religion, and the Fear of God, is the firſt Principle and Foundation of true Wiſdom, and that which we are to conſider, and take along with us in all the Deſigns and Actions of our Lives, and all Wiſdom which does not begin here, is prepoſterous, and will prove Folly in the iſſue.

Secondly, As Religion is the beginning of Wiſdom, ſo it is the Perfection of it, it is the higheſt Point of Wiſdom in which we can be Inſtructed.

ſtructed. *The fear of the Lord* (ſays *Solomon*, *Prov.* 15. 33.) *is the inſtruction of Wiſdom. A good Underſtanding* (ſays *David*, *Pſal.* 111. 10.) *have all they that do his Commandments.* The Practice of Religion is the perfection of Wiſdom; and he underſtands himſelf beſt, who lives moſt according to the Laws of God. And this I might ſhew, by inſtancing in particular Virtues, the Practice whereof is much Wiſer, and every way more for our Intereſt, than the contrary Vices; but this is too large an Argument to engage in, and therefore I ſhall content my ſelf at preſent, briefly to ſhew, that the chief Characters and Properties of Wiſdom do all meet in Religion, and agree to it.

The firſt Point of Wiſdom is to underſtand our true Intereſt, and to be right in our main End; and in this, Religion will beſt inſtruct and direct us. And if we be right in our main End, and true to the Intereſt of it, we cannot miſcarry: But if a Man miſtake in this, he errs fatally, and his whole Life is Vanity and Folly.

Another

Serm. XI.

Another Property of Wiſdom is to be ſteady and vigorous in the Proſecution of our main End. To oblige us hereto, Religion gives us the moſt powerful Arguments, the glorious Happineſs, and the diſmal Miſery of another World.

The next Point of Wiſdom is, to make all things ſtoop and become ſubſervient to our main End. And whereever Religion bears ſway, it will make all other things ſubordinate to the Salvation of our Souls, and the Intereſt of our Everlaſting Happineſs; as the Men of this World make every thing to ſubmit and give way to their Covetous, and Ambitious, and Senſual Deſigns.

Another part of Wiſdom is to Conſider the Future, and to look to the laſt End and Iſſue of things. It is a common Folly among Men, to be ſo intent upon the preſent, as to have little or no regard to the future, to what will be hereafter. Men Deſign and Labour for this preſent Life, and their

their ſhort continuance here in this World, without taking into ſerious Conſideration their main Duration, and their Eternal Abode in another World. But Religion gives us a clear Proſpect of a Life after Death, and overlooks Time, and makes Eternity always preſent to us, and minds us of making timely proviſion and preparation for it. It takes into Conſideration our whole Duration, and inſpires us with Wiſdom, to look to the End of Things, and to what will be hereafter, as well as to what is preſent.

It is likewiſe a great Property of Wiſdom to ſecure the main Chance, and to run no hazard in *that*. And this Religion directs us to take care of, becauſe the neglect of it will prove fatal.

Another Mark of Wiſdom is, to lay hold of Opportunities, thoſe eſpecially, which, when they are once paſt, will never return again. There are ſome Seaſons wherein great things may be done, which if they be let ſlip,

ſlip, are never to be retrieved. A Wiſe Man will lay hold of theſe, and improve them; and Religion inculcates this Principle of Wiſdom upon us, that this Life is the Opportunity of doing great things for our ſelves, and of making our ſelves for ever; this very Day and Hour may, for ought we know, be the laſt and only Opportunity of Repentance, and making our Peace with God? Therefore *to day, whilſt it is called to day*, let us ſet about this neceſſary Work, *leſt any of us be hardned through the deceitfulneſs of Sin*; to morrow it may be too late to begin it, and the Juſtice of God may cut us off whilſt we are wilfully delaying it; and the Opportunities of Saving our Immortal Souls may vaniſh, and be for ever hid from our Eyes. Serm. XI.

The next property of Wiſdom is, to foreſee Dangers, and to take timely care to prevent them. *The Prudent Man* (ſaith *Solomon*) *foreſeeth the Evil and hideth himſelf*; that is, ſhelters and ſecures himſelf againſt it; *but the ſimple paſs on, and are puniſhed*; that is, the

the Evil overtakes them, and their Folly is puniſh'd in their fatal Ruin. Now the greateſt Danger is from the greateſt Power; even from *him who is able to ſave, and to deſtroy*; *I will tell you* (ſays the Wiſdom of God) *whom ye ſhall fear*; *fear him, who after he hath killed, can deſtroy both Body and Soul in Hell.*

Again, another main Point of Wiſdom is, to do as little as we can to be repented of, truſting rather to the Wiſdom of Prevention, than to that of Remedy. Religion firſt teacheth Men Innocency, and not to offend; but in caſe we do, (as *in many things we offend all*) it then directs us to Repentance, as the only Remedy. But this certainly is Folly, to Sin in hopes of Repentance, that is, firſt to make work for Repentance, and then run the hazard of it; for we may certainly Sin, but it is not certain that we ſhall Repent. And if it were, yet it is great Folly to lay in beforehand, and to make work for trouble; *Næ tu ſtultus homuncio es, qui malis veniam precari, quam non peccare*, was

a Wiſe Saying of old *Cato*; *Thou art* (ſays he) *a ſilly Man indeed, who chuſeſt rather to ask Forgiveneſs, than not to Offend.* If a Man had the beſt Remedy in the World, he would not make himſelf ſick to try the Virtue of it; and it is a known Compariſon, and a very fit one, that Repentance is *Tabula poſt Naufragium, a Plank after Shipwreck.* But I am greatly afraid that thouſands of Souls, who have truſted to it, have periſhed before they could get to Land, with this Plank in their Arms. Serm. XI.

The laſt Character of Wiſdom I ſhall mention is, In all things to conſult the Peace and Satisfaction of our own Minds, without which nothing elſe can make us Happy; and this, Obedience to the Laws of God does naturaly procure. *Great Peace have they* (ſays *David*) *that love thy Law, and nothing ſhall offend them. The work of Righteouſneſs*, ſays the Prophet, *ſhall be Peace, and the effect of Righteouſneſs, quietneſs, and aſſurance for ever.* The fear of God, and the keeping of his Commandments, is the beſt Preſerva-

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tive againſt the troubles of a guilty Conſcience, and the terrifying apprehenſions of a Future Judgment. And this is the great Wiſdom of Religion, that whoſoever liveth according to the Rules and Precepts of it, prevents the chief Cauſes of diſcontent, and lays the ſureſt Foundation of a perpetual ſatisfaction of Mind, a Jewel of ineſtimable price, which none knows but he that has it; and he that hath it, knows the value of it too well to part with it for *the pleaſures of Sin, which are but for a ſeaſon*, and which always prove *bitterneſs in the end*, and for the little ſweetneſs which they yielded, leave a terrible ſting behind them.

Thus have I briefly repreſented the *Reaſonableneſs* and *Wiſdom of Religion*. It is of infinite perfection, and of a vaſt influence and extent, it reacheth to the whole Man, the Happineſs of Soul and Body; and to our whole duration, the Happineſs of this World and the next; for *Godlineſs* (that is, true Religion and Piety) *hath the Promiſe*

Promiſe of this Life, and of that which is to come. Serm. XI.

But now where are the Effects of true Religion, in the full compaſs and extent of it, to be found? Such real Effects as do in any meaſure bear a proportion to the power and perfection of their Cauſe? For nothing certainly is more Excellent and Amiable in its definition than true Religion is; but, alas! how imperfect is it in the Subject? I mean in us, who ought to ſhew forth the power and perfection of it, in the Practice and Actions of our Lives, the beſt demonſtration of the excellent frame and temper of our Minds.

What a conflict and ſtrugling do the beſt Men find between their Inclination and their Duty? How hard to reconcile our Practice and our Knowledge, and to make our Lives to agree with the Reaſon of our Minds, and the clear Conviction of our Conſciences? How difficult for a Man in this dangerous and imperfect ſtate, to be in any meaſure either ſo wiſe or ſo good

Vol. III. as he ought? How rare is it for a Man to be good natur'd, gentle and eaſie to be intreated, without being often betray'd into ſome weakneſs and ſinful compliances, eſpecially in the bad Company of our Betters? How next to impoſſible is it to be ſtrict and ſevere in our Lives, without being ſower? to govern our Lives with that perpetual Caution, and to maintain that evenneſs of temper, as not to be ſometimes peeviſh and paſſionate? and when we are ſo, not to be apt to ſay with *Jonah*, *we do well to be angry?*

There are *two* Precepts in the New Teſtament, that ſeem to me to be the niceſt of all other, and hardeſt to be put in practice. One is that of our Bleſſed Saviour, *Be wiſe as Serpents, and innocent as Doves.* How hard is it to hit upon the juſt temper of Wiſdom and Innocency; to be Wiſe, and hurt no body; to be Innocent, without being Silly? The other is, that of the Apoſtle, *be angry and Sin not.* How difficult is this, never to be angry but upon juſt Cauſe? And when the Cauſe of our Anger is juſt, not to be tranſported

tranſported beyond due bounds, either as to the degree of our Anger, or as to the duration and continuance of it? This is ſo very nice a Matter, that one would be almoſt tempted to think that this were in effect a prohibition of Anger in any Caſe; *be ye angry, and ſin not*; be yé ſo, If ye can without Sin. I believe whoſoever obſervés it, will find that it is as eaſie to ſuppreſs this Paſſion at any time, as to give way to it, without offending in one kind, or other. But to proceed, Serm. XI.

How hard a Matter is it, To be much in Company, and free in Converſation, and not to be infected by it? To live in the midſt of a wicked World, and yet to keep our ſelves free from the Vices of it? To be temperate in the uſe of things pleaſing, ſo as neither to injure our Health, nor to loſe the uſe of our Reaſon, nor to offend againſt Conſcience? To Faſt often, without being conceited of it, and bargaining as it were with God for ſome greater Liberties in another kind; and without cenſuring thoſe who do not tie up themſelves to our

Vol. III. ſtrict Rules either of Piety or Abſtinence? when perhaps they have neither the ſame Opportunities of doing it, nor the ſame Reaſon to do it that we have; nay perhaps have a much better Reaſon for not doing juſt as we do: For no Man is to preſcribe to others his own private Method, either of Faſting, or of Devotion, as if he were the *Rule*, and his Example a kind of *Proclamation*, enjoyning all his Neighbours the ſame days of Faſting and Prayer which he himſelf, for Reaſons beſt known to himſelf, thinks fit to obſerve.

And then how hard is it to be chearful without being vain? and grave and ſerious, without being moroſe? to be uſeful and inſtructive to others, in our Converſation and Diſcourſe, without aſſuming too much Authority to our ſelves? which is not the beſt and moſt effectual way of doing good to others; there being ſomething in the Nature of Man, which had rather take a hint and intimation from another, to adviſe himſelf, and would rather chuſe to imitate the ſilent good Example which

which they ſee in another, than to have either his Advice or his Example impoſed upon them. Serm. XI.

How difficult is it to have a Mind equal to every Condition, and to be content with mean and moderate things? to be Patient in adverſity, and Humble in Proſperity, and Meek upon ſudden and violent Provocations? to keep our Paſſions free from getting head of our Reaſon, and our Zeal from out-running our Knowledge? to have a Will perfectly ſubmitted and reſigned to the Will of God, even when it lies croſs and thwart to ours, ſo that whatever pleaſes God, ſhould pleaſe us? to be Reſolute, when our Duty happens to be difficult and dangerous; or even to believe that to be our Duty (tho' it certainly be ſo) which is very inconvenient for us to do? to hold out and be unwearied in well-doing? to be careful to preſerve our Lives, and yet upon a great Occaſion, and whenever God calls for them, to be content to lay them down?

To be *Wiſe* and *Innocent*; *Men in Underſtanding*, and yet *in Malice Children?* To have many great Virtues, and not to want that which gives the great luſtre to them all, I mean real and unaffected *Modeſty*, and *Humility?* In ſhort,

How difficult is it, *to have regard to all God's Commandments*, and *to hate every evil and falſe way?* To have our Duty continually in our eye, and ready to be put into practice upon every proper Occaſion? To have God, and the Conſideration of another World, always before us, preſent to our Minds, and operative upon our Practice? To live as thoſe that know they muſt die, and to have our thoughts perpetually awake, and intent upon the great and Everlaſting Concernments of our Immortal Souls?

Theſe are great things indeed, eaſie to be talkt of, but hard to be done; nay not to be done at all, without frequent and fervent Prayer to God, and the continual aids and ſupplies of his Grace; not

not without an earneſt endeavour on our parts, a vigorous reſiſtance of Temptations, and many a ſore conflict with our own perverſe Wills and ſenſual Inclinations; not without a perpetual guard and watchfulneſs over our Lives, and our unruly Appetites and Paſſions. Serm. XI.

Little do unexperienced Men, and thoſe who have taken no great pains with themſelves, imagine what Thought and Conſideration, what Care and Attention, what Reſolution and Firmneſs of Mind, what Diligence and *patient continuance in well-doing*, are requiſite to make a truly good Man; ſuch a one as St. *Paul* deſcribes, that is, *perfect and entire, and wanting nothing*; that *follows God fully*, and fulfils every part of his Duty, *having a Conſcience void of offence towards God, and towards Man.* Who is there among us, that is either wiſe enough for his own direction, or good enough for the peace and ſatisfaction of his own Mind; that is ſo happy as to know his Duty, and to do it; as to have both the Underſtanding and the Will to do in all things as he ought?

After

VOL. III. After our beſt Care, and all our Pains and Endeavours, the moſt of us will ſtill find a great many defects in our Lives and cannot but diſcern great and manifold imperfections in our very beſt Duties and Services; inſomuch that we ſhall be forced to make the ſame acknowledgment concerning them, which *Solomon* does concerning the imperfection of all things under the Sun; *that which is crooked cannot be made ſtreight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbred.* And when all is done, we have all of us reaſon to *ſay*, not only that *we are unprofitable ſervants, having done nothing but what was our duty to do*; but have cauſe likewiſe, with great ſhame and confuſion of face, to acknowledge that we have been in many reſpects *Wicked and Slothful Servants*, and ſo very far from having done what was *our duty to do*, that the greateſt part of the good which the moſt of us have done, is the leaſt part of the good which we might and ought to have done.

The

Serm XI.

The Practice of Religion, in all the Parts and Inſtances of our Duty, is work more than enough for the beſt and greateſt Mind, for the longeſt and beſt order'd Life. *The Commandment of God is exceeding broad*; and an Obedience in any good meaſure equal to the extent of it, extreamly difficult. And after all, as the Man in the Goſpel ſaid *with tears* to our Saviour, concerning the weakneſs of his own Faith, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief, Mar.*9.24. So the beſt of Men may ſay, and ſay it with *tears* too, concerning every Grace and Virtue wherein they excel moſt, "Lord, "I aſpire, I endeavour after it, be thou "pleaſed to aſſiſt my weakneſs, and to "help me by thy grace continually to "do better.

The Summ of all is this, If we be careful to do our beſt, and make it the conſtant and ſincere endeavour of our Lives to pleaſe God, and to keep his Commandments, we ſhall be accepted of him: For God values this more than *whole Burnt-Offerings and Sacrifices*, more than *thouſands of Rams, and ten thouſands*

VOL. III. *ſands of Rivers of Oyl*; becauſe this is an eſſential part of Religion, *To love God with all our hearts, and minds, and ſtrength, and to love our Neighbours as our ſelves.* The Duties comprehended in theſe two *great Commandments*, ſincerely practiſed by us (though with a great deal of imperfection) will certainly be acceptable in the ſight of God, in and through the Merits and Mediation of *Jeſus Chriſt the Righteous. Bleſſed are they* (ſaith St. *John* very plainly, in the concluſion of that obſcure Book of his Revelation) *Bleſſed are they that do his Commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life*, Rev. 22. 14.

I ſpeak now to a great many who are at the upper end of the World, and command all the Pleaſures and Enjoyments of it; but the time is coming, and (whether we think of it or not) is very near at hand, when we ſhall *ſee an end of all perfection*, and of all that is deſirable upon Earth, and upon which Men are apt to value themſelves ſo much in this World; and then nothing but Religion, and the Conſcience of

of having done our Duty to God and Man, will ſtand us in ſtead, and yield true Comfort to us. When we are going to leave the World, how ſhall we then wiſh that we had made Religion the great buſineſs of our Lives; and in the Day of God's Grace and Mercy, had exerciſed Repentance, and made our Peace with God, and prepared our ſelves for another World; that after our departure hence, we might be admitted into *the preſence of God, where is fulneſs of Joy, and at whoſe right hand are pleaſures for evermore?* Serm. XI.

Let no Man therefore, of what Rank or Condition ſoever he be in this World think himſelf too great to be good, and too Wiſe to be Religious, and to take care of his Immortal Soul, and his Everlaſting Happineſs in another World; ſince nothing but this will approve it ſelf to be *true Wiſdom* at the laſt. All other things will have an end with this Life; but Religion and the Fear of God is of a vaſt extent, and hath an influence upon our whole duration, and, after the courſe of this Life is ended, will put us into the ſecure

cure Poſſeſſion of a Happineſs which ſhall never have an end.

I will Conclude this whole Diſcourſe with thoſe words of our Bleſſed Saviour, *If ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them. Which thou, who art the Eternal Spring of Truth and Goodneſs, grant that we may all know and do in this our day, for thy Mercies ſake in Jeſus Chriſt; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghoſt be all Honour and Glory, Dominion and Power, now and for ever.* Amen.

SERMON XII.

The Nature and Influence of the Promiſes of the Goſpel.

The Second Sermon on

2 PETER I. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promiſes; that by theſe ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature.

THE Connection of theſe words with the former is ſomewhat obſcure, but it ſeems to be this. The Apoſtle had in the Verſe before ſaid, *that the Divine Power of Chriſt hath by the knowledge of the Goſpel given us all things that pertain to Life and Godlineſs*; that is, by the knowledge

knowledge of the *Goſpel* we are furniſh'd with all Advantages which conduce to make Men happy in the next Life, and Religious in this; and then it follows, *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promiſes. Whereby*; this ſeems to refer to the whole of the foregoing Verſe; as if it had been ſaid, "Chriſt by the Goſpel hath given to "us all things that conduce to our Fu- "ture Happineſs; and in order there- "to, all things which tend to make "Men holy and good. Or elſe *Life and Godlineſs* are, by a *Hebraiſm* frequent in the New Teſtament, put for *a Godly Life*. And then among all thoſe things which conduce to a Godly Life, the Apoſtle inſtanceth in the *Promiſes* of the Goſpel which do ſo directly tend to make Men *Partakers of a Divine Nature.*

In the handling of theſe words, I ſhall,

Firſt Conſider the Promiſes here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promiſes.*

Secondly

Secondly, The influence which theſe Promiſes ought to have upon us; *that by theſe ye might be made partakers of a Divine Nature,* Serm. XII.

Firſt, We will conſider the Promiſes which are here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto exceeding great and precious Promiſes.* And becauſe the chief Promiſes of the Goſpel are here intended, I ſhall take occaſion from this Text to handle the Doctrine of the Promiſes, which is frequently Diſcours'd of in Divinity, but not always ſo clearly ſtated. And to this purpoſe, it will be proper to take into Conſideration theſe *four* things.

I. What the Promiſes are which are here ſpoken of; *whereby are given unto us Promiſes.*

II. Why they are ſaid to be ſo great and precious; *exceeding great and precious Promiſes.*

III. We will Conſider the Tenour of theſe Promiſes.

IV. When Men are ſaid to have a right to them, ſo as they may apply them to themſelves Theſe *four* Heads will comprehend what I have to ſay upon this Argument.

I. What the Promiſes are which the Apoſtle here ſpeaks of; *whereby are given unto us Promiſes.* And no doubt the Apoſtle here intends thoſe great and excellent Promiſes which Chriſt hath made to us in the Goſpel. So that to ſatisfie our ſelves in this enquiry, we need only to conſider what are the Principle Promiſes of the Goſpel. Now the great Promiſes of the Goſpel are theſe *three.*

1. The Promiſe of the free Pardon and Forgiveneſs of our Sins, upon our Faith and Repentance.

2 The Promiſe of God's Grace and Holy Spirit to aſſiſt our Obedience.

3. The

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3. The Promiſe of Eternal Life to Reward it.

1. The Promiſe of the Pardon and forgiveneſs of our Sins, upon our Faith and Repentance. The Goſpel hath made full and clear Promiſes to this Purpoſe; that if we believe the Goſpel, and will forſake our Sins, and amend our wicked Lives, all that is paſt ſhall be forgiven us, and that Chriſt died for this end, to obtain for us Remiſſion of Sins in his Blood. The light of Nature, upon conſideration of the Mercy and Goodneſs of God, gave Men good hopes, that upon their Repentance God will forgive their ſins, and turn away his wrath from them. But Mankind was doubtful of this and therefore they uſed expiatory Sacrifices to appeaſe the offended Deity. The *Jewiſh* Religion allowed of no Expiation, but for legal impurities, and involuntary tranſgreſſions, ſuch as proceeded from ignorance and inadvertency; but not for *Sins of Preſumption*, and ſuch as were committed *with an high hand.* If Men ſin'd wilfully, there

was no Sacrifice appointed by the Law for ſuch Sins. But the Grace of the Goſpel juſtifies us from the greateſt Sins, upon our Faith and ſincere Repentance. So St. *Paul* tells the *Jews*, Acts 13. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveneſs of ſins: And by him all that believe are juſtified from all things, from which ye could not be juſtified by the Law of Moſes.* There was no general Promiſe of Pardon, nor way of Expiation under the Law; perfect Remiſſion of Sins is clearly revealed, and aſcertain'd to us only by the Goſpel.

2. Another great Promiſe of the Goſpel is the Promiſe of God's Grace and Holy Spirit to aſſiſt our Obedience. Our Bleſſed Saviour hath promiſed, that *our Heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* 'Tis true indeed, there was a peculiar Promiſe of the Holy Ghoſt to the Apoſtles and Chriſtians of the firſt Ages, which is not now to be expected; namely, an Extraordinary and Miraculous Power, whereby they were qualified

fied to publiſh the Goſpel to the World, and to give Confirmation to it. But now that the Chriſtian Religion is propagated and ſetled in the World, the great End and Uſe of theſe Miraculous Gifts is ceaſed: But yet the Spirit of God doth ſtill concur with the Goſpel, and work upon the Minds of Men, to excite and aſſiſt them to that which is good. And tho' this Operation be very ſecret, ſo as we cannot give an account of the manner of it, yet the effects of it are very ſenſible, and this influence of God's Holy Spirit is common to all Chriſtians in all Ages of the World. This Propoſition is Univerſally true, and in all Ages and Times; *If any Man have not the Spirit of Chriſt, he is none of his.* Serm. XII.

It muſt be acknowledged, that the Spirit doth not now work upon Men in that ſudden and ſenſible manner, as it did in the firſt Times of Chriſtianity; becauſe then Men were ſtrongly poſſeſt with the Prejudices of other Religions, which they had been brought up in; and therefore as more outward means of Conviction were then neceſ-

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ſary, ſo likewiſe a more powerful internal Operation of the Spirit of God upon the Minds of Men, to Conquer and bear down thoſe prejudices, and to ſubdue them to the Obedience of Faith. But now the Principles of Religion and Goodneſs are more gradually inſtill'd into the Minds of Men, by the gentle degrees of Pious Inſtruction and Education; and with theſe means the Spirit of God concurs in a more Humane way, which is more ſuited and accommodated to our Reaſon, and offers leſs violence to the Nature of Men. So that this Promiſe of God's Holy Spirit is now made good to us, as the Neceſſity and Circumſtances of our preſent State do require. God does not uſe ſuch extraordinary Means for the producing of thoſe Effects, which may be accompliſh'd in a more ordinary way. The aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit is ſtill neceſſary to Men, to encline and enable them to that which is good; but not in that manner and degree that it was neceſſary at firſt: Becauſe the Prejudices againſt Chriſtianity are not now ſo great, and many of thoſe advantages which were neceſſarily

ly wanting at firſt, are now ſupplied in an ordinary way; and therefore it is not reaſonable now to expect the ſame extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the Minds of Men, which we read of in the firſt beginnings of Chriſtianity. Serm. XII.

3. There is likewiſe the Promiſe of Eternal Life to Reward and Crown our Obedience. And this the Scripture ſpeaks of, as the great Promiſe of the Goſpel, 1 *Joh.* 2. 25. *This is the promiſe which he hath promiſed us, even Eternal Life.* And upon this account the new Covenant of the Goſpel is preferred before the old Covenant of the Law, becauſe it is *eſtabliſhed upon better Promiſes.* All the Special and Particular Promiſes of the Law were of Temporal good things, and theſe were the great Encouragements that were given to Obedience, under that imperfect Diſpenſation: But now *Godlineſs hath not only the Promiſe of the Life that now is, but of that which is to come*; as the Apoſtle tells us, 1 *Tim.* 4. 8. The Goſpel hath clearly revealed to us a happy State of Immortallity after this Life, of which Men had but

very obſcure and doubtful apprehenſions. So the ſame Apoſtle tells us, 2 *Tim.* 1. 10. *That it is now made manifeſt, by the appearance of our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, who hath aboliſhed Death, and hath brought Life and Immortality to light, through the Goſpel.* Holy Men had good hopes of it before; but they had no ſure diſtinct apprehenſions of it, no ſuch full aſſurance concerning it no ſuch clear and expreſs Promiſes of it, as the Goſpel hath given us.

Thus you ſee what thoſe great Promiſes are which the Goſpel hath given us, namely, the Promiſe of the Free Pardon and Forgiveneſs of our Sins, upon our Faith and Repentance; the Promiſe of God's Grace and Holy Spirit to aſſiſt our Obedience, and the Promiſe of Eternal Life and Happineſs to Reward it. Theſe are the *three* Eminent Promiſes of the Goſpel, and in all probability thoſe which the Apoſtle here calls *great and precious Promiſes*, which brings me to the

II. Thing which I propounded to Conſider, namely, why they are ſaid

ſaid to be *exceeding great and precious*, τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, *the greateſt and the moſt valuable Promiſes.* And to ſatisfie us that they are ſuch, the very Conſideration of the Bleſſings and Benefits that they carry in them will be ſufficient. If we Conſider the Condition that Mankind was in, when God was pleaſed to make theſe gracious Declarations to us, we ſhall ſee great Reaſon to ſet a high value upon every one of theſe Promiſes. Mankind was extreamly degenerated, *all Fleſh had corrupted its ways*, and *the whole World was guilty before God*, and liable to all that Miſery which the Sinner had reaſon to apprehend from the incenſed Juſtice of the Almighty. We had forfeited that Happineſs to which our Immortal Nature was deſigned, and, which made our Condition more ſad, we were *without ſtrength* to recover our ſelves out of it, by our Repentance for what was paſt (if God would have accepted of it) and by our Future Obedience. Now the Promiſes of the Goſpel offer Relief to us in all theſe Reſpects, and thereby obviate all the difficulties

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Vol. III. difficulties and diſcouragements which Mankind lay under.

The gracious Promiſe of Pardon frees us from guilt, and ſecures us from the terrible wrath of God, which our guilty Conſciences did ſo much dread; and without this Promiſe, Mankind would have been under the greateſt doubts and diſcouragements. For when Men are afraid *their Sins are greater than will be forgiven them*, they are apt to fall into Deſpair, and Deſpair is an effectual bar to Repentance; for when Men think their Condition is deſperate, they care not what they do.

And the Promiſe of God's Grace and Holy Spirit, to aſſiſt and enable us to do our Duty, does fully anſwer all the Diſcouragements and Objections from our own weakneſs, and the Power of temptation. We may *do all things through Chriſt ſtrengthning us*; and how weak ſoever we are of our ſelves, we are *ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*. If God be for us, who or what can ſtand againſt us? The Devil

Devil is a very powerful Enemy, and much too ſtrong for Fleſh and Blood to Encounter in its own ſtrength; but there is another Principle in the World, which is Mightier and more Powerful than he, the Holy Spirit of God, who is always ready to help, when we do not repulſe and refuſe his aſſiſtance; *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World*, ſays the Apoſtle, 1 *Joh.* 4. 4. The Spirit of God dwells in all thoſe who are willing to admit him, and is ever ready to aſſiſt thoſe who comply with his bleſſed Motions, and do vigorouſly put forth their own endeavours. Serm. XII.

And then the Promiſe of Eternal Life, *that* anſwers all the difficulties of our Obedience, and ſets us above any thing that the World can threaten us withal, for our Conſtancy to God, and his Truth. A Wiſe Man will be content to ſuffer any thing or to quit any thing upon terms of far greater advantage: And what greater Conſideration can be offered to encourage our Conſtancy and Obedience, than an Eternity of Happineſs?

So

Vol. III. So that the Apoſtle had reaſon to call theſe *exceeding great and valuable Promiſes*; ſo valuable, that if any one of them had been wanting, our Redemption and Recovery had either been abſolutely impoſſible, or extreamly difficult. I proceed to the.

III. Thing I propounded, which was to conſider the Tenour of theſe Promiſes; that is, whether God have made them abſolutely to us, without requiring any thing to be done on our part, or upon certain Terms and Conditions to be performed by us. That God may (if he pleaſe) make an Abſolute Promiſe of any Bleſſing or Benefit to us, there is no doubt; and that God's Grace does prevent many, and is beforehand with them, is as little to be doubted; the Spirit of God goes along with the Goſpel, moving and inclining Men to yield Obedience to it, many times before any inclination and diſpoſition thereto on their parts. But as to this Promiſe of God's Grace and Holy Spirit, the great queſtion is not about the firſt motion of it, but the continuance of this aſ-

ſiſtance,

ſiſtance, and the encreaſe of it; and this, I think may ſafely be affirmed, is promiſed only Conditionally, as alſo the Pardon of Sin, and Eternal Life. And concerning each of theſe, the Matter may quickly be decided, by plain Texts of Scripture. Serm. XII.

Concerning the Promiſe of the grace and aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, the Scripture takes notice of *two* Conditions. *Firſt* that we beg it earneſtly of God: And this our Saviour expreſſeth by *asking*, *ſeeking*, and *knocking*, which ſignifies the importunity of our Requeſts; *Our Heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that* thus *ask it.* And then *Secondly*, That we improve and make uſe of the grace which God affords us; *To him that hath, ſhall be given, and from him that hath not, ſhall be taken away even that which he ſeems to have.* That is (as appears plainly from the ſcope of the Parable) to him that uſeth that grace, and thoſe advantages which God affords him, more ſhall be given; but from him that makes no uſe of them, and therefore is as if he had them not,

not, ſhall be taken away that which he but ſeems to have, becauſe he makes no uſe of it.

Concerning the Pardon of Sins; The Scripture plainly ſuſpends that upon the general Condition of Repentance, and the change of our Lives; *Repent, that your Sins may be forgiven you*: And upon the Condition of our forgiving others; *If ye forgive Men their Treſpaſſes, then will your Heavenly Father alſo forgive you; but if ye forgive not Men their Treſpaſſes, neither will your Father forgive your Treſpaſſes*, ſays our Saviour, *Mat.* 6. 14, 15.

And then the Promiſe of Eternal Life, is every where in Scripture ſuſpended upon the Condition of Faith and Repentance, and Perſeverance in well doing. *He that believes* (ſays our Saviour) *ſhall be ſaved*, which indeed implies the whole Condition of the Goſpel. *He that Believes*; that is, he that effectually aſſents to the Doctrine of Chriſt, and is ſo perſuaded of the truth of it, as to live according to it, *ſhall be ſaved*. But if Obedience were not

not included in the Scripture Notion of Faith, yet the Scripture elſewhere expreſly makes it the Condition of our Eternal Salvation. *Heb.* 5. 9. Chriſt is there ſaid to be *the Author of Eternal Salvation to them that obey him*; thereby implying, that none ſhall be ſaved by Chriſt, but thoſe that obey the Goſpel. *Heb.* 12. 14. *Follow Holineſs, without which no Man ſhall ſee the Lord.* Rom. 2. 7, 8, 9. *To them who by patient continuance in well doing ſeek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality*, God will give *Eternal Life*; *but to them that are contentious, and obey not the Truth*, that is, the Goſpel, *but obey Unrighteouſneſs*; *Indignation, and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguiſh upon every Soul of man that doth Evil.* Serm. XII.

I cannot well imagine what can reaſonably be anſwered to ſuch plain Texts; but I will tell you what is commonly anſwered; namely, That God gives the Condition which he requires; and therefore though theſe Promiſes run in a Conditional Form, yet in truth they are abſolute; becauſe he that makes a Promiſe to another, upon

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upon a Condition which he will alſo perform, doth in effect make an abſolute Promiſe. As if a Man promiſed another ſuch an Eſtate, upon Condition he pay ſuch a Summ for it, and does promiſe withal to furniſh him with that Summ, this in effect amounts to an abſolute Promiſe of the Eſtate.

And this is very well argued, if the Caſe were thus. But God hath no where promiſed to work the Condition in us, without the concurrence of our own Endeavours, God may, and oftentimes doth prevent Men by his Grace; but he hath no where promiſed to *give his Holy Spirit*, but *to them that ask it of him.* And he hath no where promiſed to continue his grace and aſſiſtance to us, unleſs we will uſe our ſincere Endeavours; nay, in caſe we do not, he hath threatned to take away his grace and aſſiſtance from us. And if this be ſo, then the Promiſes of the Goſpel do not only *ſeem* to be Conditional, but are *really* ſo. And it is a wonder that any Man ſhould doubt of this, who conſiders how

how frequently in the New Teſtament the Goſpel is repreſented to us under the notion of a *Covenant*, ſince a Covenant in the very nature of it doth imply a mutual Obligation between the Parties that enter into it. But if the Goſpel contain only Bleſſings which are promiſed on God's part, without any thing required to be done and performed on our part, in order to the obtaining of thoſe Bleſſings, than the Goſpel is nothing elſe but a *Promiſe*, or *Deed of Gift*, making over certain Benefits and Bleſſings to us; but can in no propriety of Language in the World be called *a Covenant:* But if there be ſome things required on our part, in order to our being made Partakers of the Promiſes which God hath made to us (as the Scripture every where tells us there is) then the Promiſes are plainly *Conditional.* To inſtance in the Promiſe of Forgiveneſs of Sins; *Repent, that your Sins may be blotted out*; that is, upon this Condition that ye Repent of your Sins, they ſhall be forgiven; and not otherwiſe. Can there be any plainer Condition in the World, than is in thoſe Words of our Saviour? *If ye forgive Men their Treſpaſſes, your Heavenly Father*

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ther will alſo forgive your Treſpaſſes; but if ye forgive not Men their Treſpaſſes, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your Treſpaſſes.

This is ſo far from being any prejudice to the freeneſs of God's Grace, who is infinitely gracious in offering ſuch great Bleſſings to us upon any Condition that we can perform; yet it were one of the abſurdeſt things in the World to imagine that God ſhould grant to Men forgiveneſs of Sins, and Eternal Life, let them behave themſelves as they will.

IV. The laſt thing I propoſed for the explaining of this Doctrine of the Promiſes of God, was to conſider when Men may be ſaid to have a right to theſe Promiſes, ſo as to be able upon good grounds to apply them to themſelves? And the Anſwer to this is very plain and eaſie; namely, when they find the Conditions of theſe Promiſes in themſelves; and not till then.

When a Man hath truly repented of his Sins ſo as to forſake them, and lead a new Life; and when he does from his heart forgive thoſe that have offended him, and hath laid down all animoſity

animoſity againſt them, and thoughts of Revenge, then hath he a right to the Promiſe of Pardon and Forgiveneſs, and may apply to himſelf in particular what the Scripture ſaith in general, that *God will blot out all his Tranſgreſſions, and remember his Iniquities no more.* When a Man doth conſtantly and earneſtly implore the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit, and is ready to yield to the motions of it, and does faithfully make uſe of that ſtrength and aſſiſtance which God affords him, then he may expect the continuance of his Grace, and further degrees of it. When a Man makes it the conſtant and ſincere endeavour of his Life, to pleaſe God, and *to walk in all the Ordinances and Commandments of the Lord blameleſs, and is effectually taught by the grace of God to deny ungodlineſs, and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godlily in this preſent World*, then he may with comfort and joy *wait for the bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt*; then he may with confidence depend upon God, *in ſure and certain hope of that Eternal Life, which God, that*

Serm. XII.

Vol. III. *cannot lie, hath promiſed.* When he can ſay with St. *Paul, I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the Faith,* then he may likewiſe triumph, as he did, *henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteouſneſs, which God the Righteous Judge ſhall give me in that day.*

Upon theſe Terms, and in theſe Caſes, Men may upon good grounds apply to themſelves theſe *exceeding great and precious Promiſes* of the Goſpel; and ſo far as any Man is doubtful and uncertain of the performance of the Conditions which the Goſpel requires, ſo far he muſt neceſſarily queſtion his Right and Title to the Bleſſings promiſed. And if any Man think this Doctrine too uncomfortable, and be willing to reject it upon this account, I ſhall only ſay this, That Men may cheat themſelves, if they pleaſe, but moſt certainly they will never find any true and ſolid Comfort in any other. This is a plain and ſenſible account of a Man's Confidence and good Hopes in the Promiſes of God; but for a Man to apply any Promiſe to himſelf, before he finds the

the Condition in himſelf, is not *Faith*, but either *Fancy*, or *Preſumption*. Serm. XII.

And therefore it is a very prepoſterous Courſe which many take, to adviſe and exhort Men, with ſo much earneſtneſs to apply the Promiſes of God to themſelves, and to tell them that they are guilty of great unbelief in not doing it. That which is proper to exhort Men to, is to endeavour to perform the Condition upon which God hath promiſed any Bleſſing to us; and when Men find the Condition in themſelves, they will without any great perſuaſion take Comfort from the Promiſe, and apply it to themſelves; but till they diſcern the Condition in themſelves, it is impoſſible for a Man that underſtands himſelf, to apply the Promiſe to himſelf; for till the Condition be performed, he hath no more Right to the Promiſe, than if ſuch a Promiſe had never been made. And 'tis ſo far from being a Sin in ſuch a Man, to doubt of the benefit of ſuch a Promiſe, that it is his Duty to do ſo; and no Man that underſtands himſelf, and the

Promiſes of God, can poſſibly do otherwiſe.

Therefore 'tis a vain and groundleſs trouble which perplexeth many People, that they cannot apply the Promiſes of God to themſelves; whereas the true ground of their trouble ſhould be this, that they have not been careful to perform the Condition of thoſe Promiſes which they would apply to themſelves; the other is an endleſs trouble; let them but look to the Condition, and the Promiſe will apply it ſelf. I ſpeak all this on purpoſe to free Men from thoſe perplexities wherewith many have entangled themſelves, by falſe apprehenſions of the Promiſes of God, either as if they were not made to us upon certain Conditions to be performed by us, or as if any Man could comfortably apply them to himſelf, before he hath performed thoſe Conditions upon which God hath made ſuch Promiſes. For if Men will believe that which is not true, or expect things upon ſuch terms as they are not to be had, they may trouble themſelves Eternally, and all the World cannot help it.

I have

I have now done with the *Firſt* thing I propounded to ſpeak to, namely the Promiſes which are here ſpoken of. The *Second* thing, (*viz.*) what Influence theſe Promiſes ought to have upon us, *that by them we may be made Partakers of the Divine Nature*, I ſhall reſerve to another Opportunity. Serm. XII.

SERMON XIII.

The Nature and Influence of the Promiſes of the Goſpel.

The Second Sermon on

2 PETER. I. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promiſes; that by theſe ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature.

I Made entrance into theſe words the laſt Day, in the handling whereof I propoſed to do the theſe *two* things.

Firſt, To conſider the *Promiſes* here ſpoken of; *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promiſes.*

Secondly,

Secondly, The Influence which theſe Promiſes ought to have upon us; *that by theſe ye might be partakers of a Divine Nature.*

The *firſt* of theſe I have done with, and proceed now to the

Second, viz. The Influence which theſe Promiſes ought to have upon us; *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promiſes, that by theſe ye might be partakers of a Divine Nature.* Not that we can *partake of the Eſſence and Nature of God*, as ſome have blaſphemouſly affirmed, pretending, in their canting and ſenſeleſs Language, to be *Godded with God*, and *Chriſted with Chriſt.* In this ſenſe it is impoſſible for us to *partake of the Divine Nature*; for this would be for *Men* to become *Gods*, and to be advanced to the State and Perfection of the Deity. But the word φύσις doth frequently in Scripture ſignifie a *temper* and *diſpoſition*; and to be *partakers of a Divine Nature*, is to be of *a Divine Temper and Diſpoſition*, to have our Corrupt Natures rectified and purged

ged from all ſinful Luſts, and irregular Paſſions, and from all Vicious and Corrupt Affections; and therefore it follows in the Text, *having eſcaped the Corruption that is in the World through Luſt; and beſides this, giving all diligence, add to your Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godlineſs, and to Godlineſs Brotherly-kindneſs, and to Brotherly-kindneſs Charity.* So that we are *made partakers of a Divine Nature*, as the Apoſtle here explains it, theſe *two* ways; by cleanſing our ſelves from the Luſts of the Fleſh, which the Apoſtle here calls the *corruption* or *defilement which is in the World through Luſt*; and by a diligent endeavour after all Chriſtian Graces, and Virtues, Faith, and Temperance, and Patience, a ſincere love of the Brethren, and an Univerſal Charity and goodwill towards all Men. Serm. XIII.

And that this is the proper influence and efficacy of the great Promiſes of the Goſpel upon the hearts and lives of Men, the Apoſtle St. *Paul* fully declares

clares to us, 2 *Cor.* 7. 1. *Having therefore theſe Promiſes, Dearly Beloved, let us cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of the Fleſh, and Spirit*; that is, from the luſts of the Fleſh, and of uncleanneſs, and from all evil and corrupt affections of the Mind, ſuch as Wrath, Envy, Malice, Hatred, Strife, Revenge, Cruelty, Pride, and the like; *perfecting holineſs in the fear of God*; that is, continually aſpiring ſtill more and more after further degrees of Holineſs, and Virtue, and Goodneſs, which are the great Perfections of the Divine Nature. And thus by a conſtant and ſincere endeavour *to cleanſe our ſelves from all impurity of Fleſh and Spirit*, and by *practiſing all the Virtues of a good Life*, we ſhall by degrees raiſe and advance our ſelves to *a Godlike temper and diſpoſition*, imitating in all our Actions the Goodneſs, and Mercy, and Patience, and Truth, and Faithfulneſs of God, and all thoſe other Perfections of the Divine Nature, which are comprehended under the term of *Holineſs*. This is that which the Apoſtle here calls *partaking of a Divine Nature*; or,

as

as our Bleſſed Saviour expreſſeth it, *to be perfect, as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect.* Serm. XIII.

This the Goſpel deſigns to raiſe us to; and one of the great Inſtruments whereby this is effected, are thoſe *exceeding great and precious Promiſes* which I have inſiſted upon: And they are capable of effecting it theſe *two* ways.

Firſt, By way of internal Efficacy and Aſſiſtance; and,

Secondly, By way of external Motive and Argument: Both theſe ways, ſome or other of theſe Promiſes have a mighty influence upon us (if we be not wanting to our ſelves) to raiſe us to a Godlike temper and diſpoſition, that is, to the greateſt perfection of Virtue and Goodneſs which we are capable of in this Life.

Firſt, By way of internal Efficacy and Aſſiſtance. And this influence the Promiſe of God's Holy Spirit and of the gracious help and aſſiſtance thereof,

VOL. III. of, hath upon the Minds of Men, inclining them to that which is good, and enabling them to do it. For the Holy Spirit is promiſed to us, in conſideration and commiſeration of that impotency and weakneſs which we have contracted in that degenerate and depraved Condition into which Mankind is ſunk; to help us, who are *without ſtrength* to recover our ſelves out of that evil and miſerable ſtate into which by wilful tranſgreſſion we are fallen; to *quicken us who are dead in Treſpaſſes and Sins*, (as the Scripture expreſſeth the Condition of unregenerate Perſons) to *raiſe us to a new Life*, and to cheriſh this Principle of Spiritual Life, which is commonly weak at firſt, and to carry it through all diſcouragements and oppoſitions; to excite us continually to our Duty, and to enable us to the moſt difficult parts of Obedience, ſuch as are moſt contrary to our natural inclinations, and againſt the grain of fleſh and blood, to bear down the ſtrength of Sin and Temptation; and in all our Conflicts with the World, and the Fleſh, the Devil, and all the Powers of Darkneſs, to make

make us victorious over them; and, in a word, to be a Principle within us, more mighty and powerful than the Luſts and Inclinations of our evil Hearts, than the moſt obſtinate and inveterate habits of Sin and Vice, and than all the Temptations and Terrors of Senſe. So that if we will make uſe of this Aſſiſtance, and lay hold of this ſtrength which God affords us in the Goſpel, and (as the Apoſtle expreſſeth it) *be workers together with God*, we need not deſpair of Victory and Succeſs; for our ſtrength will continually encreaſe, and the force and violence of our Luſts will be abated, God will give us more Grace, and we ſhall *walk from ſtrength to ſtrength*, and *our path will be* (as *Solomon* ſays of *the way of the Righteous*) *as the light which ſhines more and more unto the perfect day.* Serm. XIII.

For the Holy Spirit of God conducts and manageth this great work of our Sanctification and Salvation from firſt to laſt, by opening our Hearts to let in the light of Divine Truth upon our Minds, by repreſenting

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ing to us with advantage ſuch Arguments and Conſiderations as are apt to perſuade us to embrace it, and yield to it; by ſecret and gentle reprehenſions, ſoftning our hard hearts, and bending our ſtiff and ſtubborn Wills to a compliance with the Will of God, and our Duty. And this is that great Work which the Scripture calls our *Regeneration*, and *Sanctification*, the *turning us from darkneſs to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, a new Creation*, and *a Reſurrection from the Death of Sin, to the Life of Holineſs.* And then by leading and directing us in the ways of Holineſs and Obedience; by quickning our Devotion, and ſtirring up in us Holy Deſires and Diſpoſitions of Soul, rendring us fit to draw near to God in Prayer, with a due ſenſe of our own wants and unworthineſs, and an humble Confidence in the goodneſs of God, that he will grant us thoſe good things that we ask of him; in ſupporting and comforting us in all our Afflictions and Sufferings, eſpecially for Truth and Righteouſneſs ſake; and by Sealing and Confirming to us the Bleſſed Hopes of

of Eternal Life. Thus the Spirit of God carries on the Work of our Sanctification, and makes us *Partakers of a Divine Nature*, by way of inward efficacy and assistance. Serm. XIII.

Secondly, The Promises of the Gospel are apt likewise to have a mighty influence upon us by way of Motive and Argument, to engage and encourage us to *cleanse our selves from all filthiness of Flesh and Spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.* For,

First, A full Pardon and Indemnity for what is past, is a mighty encouragement for us to return to our Duty, and a forcible Argument to keep us to it for the future. For since God, who hath been so highly injured and affronted by us, is so willing and ready to forgive us, as not only to provide and purchase for us the Means of our Pardon, by the grievous Sufferings of his dear Son, but to offer it so freely, and invite us so earnestly to accept of it, and to be reconciled to him; the Consideration of this ought in all Reason, Ingenuity, and Gratitude, to

melt us into Sorrow and Repentance for our Sin, and a deep ſenſe of the evil of them, and to enflame our hearts with a mighty love to God, and our bleſſed Redeemer, *who hath loved us, and waſhed us from our ſins in his own Blood*; And to make us extreamly unwilling, nay moſt firmly reſolved never more to offend that merciful and gracious God, who is ſo ſlow to puniſh, and ſo forward to forgive; and effectually to engage us to a dutiful and conſtant and chearful Obedienc to God's holy Laws and Commandments, leſt by our wilful tranſgreſſion and violation of them, we ſhould run our ſelves into a deeper guilt, and aggravate our Condemnation. Now that by the tender Mercies of our God we are *made whole*, we ſhould be infinitely afraid *to ſin any more, leſt worſe things come to us*; leſt we relapſe into a more incurable ſtate, and bring a heavier load of guilt and miſery upon our ſelves.

Secondly, The Promiſe of God's Grace and Holy Spirit is likewiſe a very powerful Argument and Encouragement to Holineſs, and Goodneſs, engaging

engaging us *to cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit*, that our Souls and Minds may be a fit Temple for the Holy Ghoſt, which will not dwell in an impure Soul: And likewiſe Encouraging us hereto, by this Conſideration, that we have ſo unerring a Guide to Council and Direct us, ſo Powerful an Aſſiſtant *to ſtrengthen* us *with all might in the Inner Man*, to ſtand by us in all our Conflicts with Sin and Satan, and make us (as to the Apoſtle expreſſeth it) *more than Conquerours* over all our Spiritual Enemies. For tho' we be weak, and our Luſts ſtrong, our Enemies many, and Temptations mighty and violent; yet we need not be diſheartned, ſo long as we know that *God is with us*, and *the Grace of his Holy Spirit ſufficient for us*, againſt all the ſtrength of Sin, and Hell; tho' our Duty be hard, and our ſtrength ſmall, yet we cannot fail of Succeſs, if we be ſure that the Omnipotent Grace of God is always ready to ſecond our ſincere, tho' never ſo weak Endeavours. So that when we ſee all the Enemies of our Salvation drawn up in array againſt us, we Serm. XIII.

may encourage our ſelves, as the Prophet *Eliſha* did his Servant, when he told him that *an Hoſt compaſſed the City with Horſes and Chariots*, and ſaid, *Alas! my Maſter, how ſhall we do?* And *he anſwered, fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them*; 2 *King.* 6. 16. Or, as *Hezekiah* Comforted the People, when they were afraid of the mighty force of the King of *Aſſyria*, 2 Chron. 32. 7, 8. *Be ſtrong and couragious, be not afraid nor diſmayed for the King of Aſſyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: For there be more with us, than with him. With him is an arm of fleſh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight for us.* This is the Caſe of every Chriſtian; the force that is againſt us is finite and limited; but the Almighty God is on our ſide, and fights for us; and every one of us may ſay with St. *Paul*, Philip. 4. 13. *I can do all things through Chriſt which ſtrengtheneth me.*

Thirdly, The Promiſe of Eternal Life and Happineſs, if duly weighed and conſidered, hath a mighty force in it to

to take us off from the Love and Practice of Sin, and to encourage our Obedience, and *patient continuance in well-doing.* The aſſurance of enjoying unſpeakable and endleſs Happineſs in another World, and of eſcaping extream and eternal Miſery, is a Conſideration of that weight, as one would think could not fail of its efficacy upon us, to put all Temptations to Sin out of countenance, and to bear down before us all the difficulties and diſcouragements in the way of our Duty. And if this make no impreſſion upon us, if Heaven and Hell be of no weight with us, it will be in vain to uſe any other Arguments, which in Compariſon of this, are *but as the very ſmall duſt upon the balance.* For if on the one hand the hopes of perfect Comfort, and Joy, and Felicity, perpetual in duration, and vaſt beyond all imagination, *ſuch as eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, nor hath entred into the heart of Man to conceive*; And if on the other hand, the dread of the terrible wrath of God, and of the vengance of Eternal Fire, together with the inſupportable torments of a guilty *Conſcience*, and Serm. XIII.

the perpetual ſtings of bitter remorſe and anguiſh for the wilful folly of our wicked Lives, and the rage of horrible Deſpair of ever getting out of ſo miſerable a State; If neither of theſe Conſiderations, if both of them will not prevail upon us *to ceaſe to be evil*, and to *reſolve to be good*, that we may obtain one of theſe Conditions, and may eſcape the other; there is no hope that any words that can be uſed, any Arguments and Conſiderations that can be offered, ſhould work upon us, or take place with us. He that is not to be tempted by ſuch hopes, nor to be terrified by ſuch fears, is proof againſt all the force of Perſwaſion in the World.

And thus I have done with the *two* things which I propoſed to conſider from theſe words; the Nature of theſe *Promiſes*, and the Influence they are apt, and ought to have upon us, to raiſe us to the perfection of Virtue and Goodneſs, which the Apoſtle here calls our being *Partakers of a Divine Nature*. All that now remains is, to make ſome uſeful

uſeful Reflections upon what hath been diſcourſed upon theſe *two* Heads. Serm. XIII.

Firſt of all, If we expect the Bleſſings and Benefits of theſe *exceeding great and precious Promiſes* of the Goſpel, we muſt be careful to perform the Conditions which are indiſpenſably required on our parts. It is a great miſtake, and of very pernicious conſequence to the Souls of Men, to imagine that the Goſpel is all Promiſes on God's part; and that our part is only to believe them, and to rely upon *God* for the performance of them, and to be very confident that he will make them good, tho' we do nothing elſe but only believe that he will do ſo. That the Chriſtian Religion is only a Declaration of God's good will to us, without any expectation of Duty from us; this is an Error which one could hardly think could ever enter into any who have the liberty to read the Bible, and do attend to what they read, and find there.

VOL. III. The *Three* great Promiſes of the Goſpel are all very expreſly contain'd in our Saviour's firſt Sermon upon the Mount. There we find the Promiſe of *Bleſſedneſs* often repeated; but never abſolutely made, but upon Certain Conditions, and plainly required on our parts; As Repentance, Humility, Righteouſneſs, Mercy, Peaceableneſs, Meekneſs, Patience. *Forgiveneſs of Sins* is likewiſe Promiſed; but only to thoſe that make a Penitent acknowledgement of them, and ask Forgiveneſs for them, and are ready to grant that Forgiveneſs to others, which they beg of God for themſelves. *The Gift of God's Holy Spirit* is likewiſe there Promiſed; but it is upon Condition of our earneſt and importunate Prayer to God. The Goſpel is every where full of Precepts, enjoyning Duty and Obedience on our part, as well as of Promiſes on God's part, aſſuring Bleſſings to us; nay, of terrible Threatnings alſo if we diſobey the Precepts of the Goſpel. St. *Paul* gives us the ſumm of the Goſpel in very few and plain words,

words, declaring upon what Terms we may expect that Salvation which the Goſpel offers to all Men, *Tit.* 2. 11, 12, 13, 14. *The grace of God which bringeth Salvation hath appeared to all Men; teaching us, that denying ungodlineſs and worldly Luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, and righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world, looking for that bleſſed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt; Who gave himſelf for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purifie unto himſelf a peculiar People, zealous of good works.* And then he adds, *Theſe things ſpeak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority*; Intimating, that tho' Men were very averſe to this Doctrine, it ought to be inculcated with great Authority and Earneſtneſs, and thoſe who oppoſed and deſpiſed it, to be ſeverely rebuked: And with great Reaſon, becauſe the contrary Doctrine does moſt effectually undermine and defeat the whole Deſign of the Chriſtian Religion. Serm. XIII.

Secondly,

Vol. III. *Secondly*, From hence we learn, that if the Promiſes of the Goſpel have not this effect upon us, to make us *Partakers of a Divine Nature*, it is our own fault, and becauſe we are wanting to our ſelves. God is always ready to do his part; if we do not fail in ours. There is a Divine Power and Efficacy goes along with the Goſpel, to make way for the entertainment of it in the hearts of Men, where they put no bar and obſtacle to it. But if Men will reſiſt the Motions of God's Bleſſed Spirit, and quench the light of it, and obſtinately hold out againſt the force of Truth; God will withdraw his Grace and Holy Spirit from them. The Goſpel would raiſe us to the perfection of all virtue and goodneſs; and the Promiſes of it are admirably fitted to relieve the infirmities and weakneſs of Humane Nature, and *to renew us after the Image of God, in Righteouſneſs, and true Holineſs*; to take us off from Sin and Vice, and to allure us to Goodneſs; and to aſſiſt and encourage us in the practice of it: But if we will not comply with the gracious

gracious Deſign of God in the Goſpel, and ſuffer theſe Promiſes to have their due Influence and Efficacy upon us; we wilfully deprive our ſelves of all the Bleſſings and Benefits of it, *we reject the Counſel of God againſt our ſelves*, and *receive the Grace of God in vain*; and by rejecting and deſpiſing his Promiſes, we provoke him to execute his Threatnings upon us. Serm. XIII.

Thirdly, and Laſtly, If the Promiſes of the Chriſtian Religion are apt in their own Nature to work this great effect upon us, to make us like to God, and to bring us to ſo near a reſemblance of the Divine Perfections, to make us Good and Juſt, and Merciful, and Patient, and *Holy in all manner of Converſation*, *to purge us from our Iniquities*, and *to make us a Peculiar and Excellent People, zealous of good works*; I ſay if this be the proper tendency of the Goſpel, and the Promiſes of it, how doth this upbraid the degenerate ſtate of the Chriſtian World at this day, which does ſo abound in all kind of Wickedneſs and Impiety? So that we may cry out

out as he did, upon Reading the Gospel; *Profecto aut hoc non est Evangelium; aut nos non sumus Evangelici*; "Either this is not the Gospel which "we read, and the Christian Reli- "gion which we profess; or we are "no Christians. We are so far from that pitch of Goodness and Virtue which the Christian Religion is apt to raise Men to, and which the Apostle here calls *the Divine Nature*, that a great part of us are degenerated into Beasts and Devils, wallowing in abominable and filthy Lusts, indulging our selves in those Devilish Passions of Malice and Hatred, of Strife and Discord, of Revenge and Cruelty, of Sedition, and Disturbance of the Publick Peace, to that degree, as if *the Grace of God* had never *appeared* to us *to teach* us the contrary. And therefore it concerns all those who have the face to call themselves Christians, to demean themselves at another rate, and for the Honour of their Religion, and the Salvation of their own Souls, *to have thier Conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ*; and by departing from the Vicious Practices

&tiſes of this preſent Evil World, to do what in them lies to prevent the Judgments of God which hang over us; or if they cannot do that, *to ſave themſelves from this untoward Generation.* Serm. XIII.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

The Support of Good Men, under their Sufferings for Religion.

1 PETER IV. 19.

Wherefore, let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

THIS Epiſtle was written by St. *Peter*, who was the Apoſtle of the Circumciſion, to the diſperſed *Jews*, who were newly Converted to Chriſtianity; And the Deſign of it is to Confirm and Eſtabliſh them in the Profeſſion of; and to inſtruct

Vol. III. inſtruct them how they ought to demean themſelves towards the Heathen or Gentiles, among whom they lived; and more particularly to arm and prepare them for thoſe Sufferings and Perſecutions, which he foretels would ſhortly overtake them for the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, that when they ſhould happen, they might not be ſurpriſed and ſtartled at them, as if ſome ſtrange and unexpected thing were come upon them; at the 12th *v.* of this Chapter, *Beloved, think it not ſtrange concerning the fiery Tryal which is to try you*; that is, do not wonder and be not aſtoniſh'd at it, *as if ſome ſtrange thing happened unto you.*

And then he inſtructs them more particularly, how they ought to behave themſelves under thoſe Trials and Sufferings, when they ſhould happen; not only with Patience, which Men ought to Exerciſe under all kinds of Sufferings upon what Account and Cauſe ſoever; but with Joy and Chearfulneſs; conſidering the Glorious Example and Reward of them, v. 13. *but rejoyce, in as much as ye are partakers*

kers of Chriſts Sufferings; that when his Glory ſhall be revealed, ye may be glad alſo with exceeding Joy: And at the 14. *ver.* he tells them, that beſides the Encouragement of ſo great an Example, and ſo glorious a Reward, they ſhould be ſupported and aſſiſted in a very extraordinary manner, by the Spirit of God reſting upon them in a glorious manner, as a Teſtimony of the Divine Power and Preſence with them; v. 14. *If ye be reproached for the Name of Chriſt, happy are ye; for the Spirit of Glory and of God reſteth upon you;* or, as it is in the beſt Copies, *for the Spirit of Glory and of Power, even the Spirit of God reſteth upon you;* that is, the Glorious Power of the Divine Spirit is preſent with you, to comfort and bear up your Spirits under theſe Sufferings. But then he cautions them, to take great care, that their Sufferings be for a good Cauſe, and a good Conſcience; v. 15. *But let none of you ſuffer as a Murderer, or as a Thief, or as an evil-doer,* (that is, as an Offender in any kind againſt Humane Laws, made to preſerve the Peace and good Order of the Word)

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or as a buſy-body in other Mens matters; that is, as a pragmatical Perſon, that meddles out of his own Sphere, to the Diſquiet and Diſturbance of Humane Society: For to ſuffer upon any of theſe Accounts, would be matter of Shame and Trouble, but not of Joy and Comfort: But if they ſuffer'd upon Account of the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, this would be no Cauſe of Shame and Reproach to them; but they ought rather to give God Thanks for calling them to ſuffer in ſo good a Cauſe, and upon ſo glorious an Account. v. 16. *Yet if any Man ſuffer as a Chriſtian* (if that be his only Crime) *let him not be aſhamed, but let him glorifie God on this behalf*; *for the time is come, that Judgment muſt begin at the Houſe of God*; that is, the wiſe and juſt Providence of God, hath ſo order'd it at this Time, for very good Reaſons and Ends, that the firſt Calamities and Sufferings ſhould fall upon Chriſtians, the peculiar People and Church of God, for their Trial, and a Teſtimony to the Truth of that Religion, which God was now planting

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ing in the World: *And if it firſt begin at us*, (that is, at us *Jews*, who were the Ancient People of God, and have now embraced and entertained the Revelation of the Goſpel) *what ſhall the end be of them, that obey not the Goſpel of God?* (That is, how much more ſeverely will God deal with the reſt of the *Jews* who have Crucified the Son of God, and ſtill preſiſt in their Infidelity and Diſobedience to the Goſpel? (*And if the Righteous ſcarcely be ſaved, where ſhall the ungodly and the ſinner appear?* (That is, if good Men be ſaved with ſo much difficulty, and *muſt through ſo many Tribulations enter into the Kingdom of God*, What will become of all Ungodly and Impenitent Sinners? Where ſhall they appear? How ſhall they be able to ſtand in the Judgment of the great Day? From the Conſideration of all which, the Apoſtles makes this Inference or Concluſion, in the laſt verſe of this Chapter, *Wherefore let them that ſuffer according to the Will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* Serm. XIV.

Vol. III. Thus you ſee the Connection and Dependance of theſe words, upon the Apoſtle's forgoing Diſcourſe. I ſhall explain the ſeveral Expreſſions in the Text, and then handle the main Points contained in them.

The Expreſſions to be explained are theſe: What is meant by *thoſe that ſuffer according to the will of God?* what by *committing the keeping of our Souls to God, as unto a faithful Creator?* and what by *well-doing?*

Firſt, What is meant by *ſuffering according to the will of God?* This may be underſtood of Suffering in a good Cauſe, ſuch as God will approve: But this is not ſo probable; becauſe this is mentioned afterwards, in the following Expreſſions of *committing the keeping of our Souls to God in well-doing*; that is, in ſuffering upon a good Account: And therefore the plain and genuine Senſe of this Expreſſion ſeems to be this; that thoſe who according to the good Pleaſure of God's Will, and the wiſe diſpenſation of his Providence,

vidence are appointed to ſuffer for his Cauſe, ſhould demean themſelves ſo and ſo; *Let them that ſuffer according to the will of God*; that is, thoſe whom *God* thinks fit to call to Suffering. And this agrees very well with the like Expreſſion, *Chap.* 3. of this Epiſt. *ver.* 17. *For it is better, if the will of God be ſo,* (that is, if God have ſo appointed it, and think it fit) *that ye ſuffer for well-doing than for evil-doing.* Serm. XIV.

Secondly, What is here meant by *committing the keeping of our Souls to God, as to a faithful Creator?* That is, to depoſit our Lives, and all that belongs to us, in a word, our ſelves, in the Hands and Cuſtody of his Merciful Care and Providence who made us, and therefore we may be ſure will faithfully keep what we commit to him: For as we are his Creatures, he is engaged to take care of us, and will not abandon the work of his own hands. Beſides that he hath Promiſed to be more eſpecially concerned for good Men, to ſupport them in their Sufferings for a good Cauſe, and to

Reward them for it; *and he is faithful that hath promiſed.*

And therefore there is great Reaſon and great Encouragement, in all our Sufferings for God's Cauſe and Truth, to commit our Souls to his Care and Cuſtody: Our Souls, that is (as I ſaid before) our Lives, and all that belongs to us; in a word, our ſelves: For ſo the word *Soul* is frequently uſed both in the Old and New Teſtament, *Pſal.* 7. 5. *Let the Enemy perſecute my Soul, and take it:* That is, my Life; for ſo it follows in the next words; *yea, let him tread down my life upon the Earth.* And *Pſal.* 54. 3. *Oppreſſors ſeek after my Soul.* And *Pſal.* 59. 3. *they lie in wait for my Soul*; that is, my Life. And *Pſal.* 16. 10. *Thou wilt not leave my Soul in Hell, my Soul*; that is, *my ſelf*, thou wilt not ſuffer me to continue in the Grave, and under the power of Death, but wilt raiſe me up to Life again. And ſo likewiſe in the New Teſtament, *Mar.* 8. 35. *Whoſoever will ſave his life, ſhall loſe it; but whoſoever ſhall loſe his life for my ſake and the Goſpels, the ſame ſhall ſave it.* The ſame word which is here rendred *Life*,

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Life, in the very next Verſe is rendred *Soul: For what ſhall it profit a Man, if he ſhall gain the whole World, and loſe his own Soul?* That is, his *Life*. And ſo likewiſe *Joh.* 12. 25. *He that loveth his Life, ſhall loſe it: And he that hateth his Life in this World,* (in the Original the Word ſignifies *Soul*) *He that hateth his Life in this World*; (that is, who neglecteth and expoſeth his Life in this World, for the ſake of Chriſt) *ſhall keep it unto Life Eternal.* And *Luke* 9. 25. that which the other Evangeliſt render by the Word *Soul*, or *Life*, he renders *himſelf*; *for what is a Man advantaged, if he gain the whole World, and loſe himſelf?* And ſo here in the Text, *to commit the keeping of our Souls to God*, is to commit *our ſelves* to his Care and Providence.

Thirdly, What is here meant by *committing our ſelves to him in well-doing?* By *well-doing* is here meant, a fixt Purpoſe and Reſolution of doing our Duty, notwithſtanding all hazards and ſufferings; which is call'd by St. *Paul*, Rom. 2. 7. *A patient continuance*

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nuance in well-doing. It ſignifies ſometimes Acts of Goodneſs and Charity; But in this Epiſtle it is taken in a larger ſenſe for Conſtancy and Reſolution in the doing of our Duty; as Chap. 2. 15. *for ſo is the will of God, that with well-doing* (that is, by a Reſolute Conſtancy in a good Courſe) *ye may put to ſilence the ignorance of fooliſh Men.* And *ver.* 20. *But if when ye do well, and ſuffer for it* (That is, if when ye ſuffer for well-doing) *ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.* And Chap. 3. *ver.* 6. *As long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement*; that is, are Reſolute and Conſtant in doing your Duty, notwtihſtanding all Threatnings and Terrors. And *ver.* 17. *For it is better, if the will of God be ſo, that ye ſuffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing*; that is, for your Religion and Conſtancy in ſo good a Cauſe, as Chriſtians, and not as Criminals upon any other account.

So that the plain meaning of the words is, as if the Apoſtle had ſaid, wherefore being forewarned of Suffering and Perſecution for the Cauſe of Religion, the ſumm of my direction

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and advice upon the whole matter is this; that ſince it is the will of God that ye ſhould ſuffer upon this account, commit your ſelves in the conſtant diſcharge of your Duty, and a good Conſcience, to the particular Care and Providence of Almighty God, as your faithful Creatour. Serm. XIV.

And now I come to handle the particular Points contained in the words; and they are theſe *Three.*

Firſt, That when Men do ſuffer really and truly for the Cauſe of Religion, they may with confidence commit themſelves (their Lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more eſpecial Care of the Divine Prodence.

Secondly, Always provided, that we do nothing contrary to our Duty, and a good Conſcience; for this the Apoſtle means, by *committing our ſelves to God, in well-doing.* If we ſtep out of the way of our Duty, or do any thing contrary to it, God's Providence will not

VOL. III. not be concerned for us, to bear us out in ſuch Sufferings.

Thirdly, I ſhall Conſider what ground of Comfort and Encouragement the Conſideration of God, as *a faithful Creator*, affords to us in all our Sufferings, for a good Cauſe, and a good Conſcience.

Firſt, When Men do ſuffer really and truly for the Cauſe of Religion, and God's Truth, they may with confidence and good aſſurance commit themſelves, (their Lives and all that is to dear to them) to the particular and more eſpecial Care of his Providence. In the handling of this, I ſhall Conſider theſe *three* things.

I. When Men may be ſaid to Suffer really and truly for the Cauſe of Religion; and when not.

II. How far they may rely upon the Providence of God, to bear them out in theſe Sufferings.

III. What

III. What Ground and Reaſon there is to expect the more particular and eſpecial Care of God's Providence, in caſe of ſuch Sufferings. Serm. XIV.

I. When Men may be ſaid to Suffer really and truly for the Cauſe of Religion, and God's Truth; and when not. In theſe Caſes.

Firſt, When Men Suffer for not renouncing the True Religion, and becauſe they will not openly declare againſt it, and Apoſtatize from it. But it will be ſaid, that in all theſe Caſes the Queſtion is, What is the true Religion? To which I Anſwer; That all Diſcourſes of this Nature, about Suffering for Religion, do ſuppoſe the truth of ſome Religion or other. And among Chriſtians, the truth of the Chriſtian Religion is taken for granted; where ever we ſpeak of Mens ſuffering Perſecution for it. And the plaineſt Caſe among Chriſtians, is, when they are Perſecuted, becauſe they will not openly deny and renounce the Chriſtian Religion. And this was generally

nerally the Caſe of the Primitive Chriſtians; they were threatned with Tortures and Death, becauſe they would not Renounce Jeſus Chriſt, and his Religion, and give Demonſtration thereof, by offering Sacrifices to the Heathen Gods.

Secondly, Men do truly ſuffer for the Cauſe of Religion, when they are Perſecuted only for making an open Profeſſion of the Chriſtian Religion, by joyning in the Aſſemblies of Chriſtians for the Worſhip of God; tho' they be not urged to deny and diſclaim it, but only to conceal and diſſemble the Profeſſion of it, ſo as to forbear the maintenance and defence of it upon fitting Occaſions, againſt the Objections of thoſe who are Adverſaries of it. For to conceal the Profeſſion of it, and to decline the defence of it, when juſt occaſion is offer'd, is *to be aſhamed of it*, which our Saviour Interprets to be a kind of *denial* of it, and is oppoſed to *the confeſſing of him before Men*, Mat. 10. 32, 33. *Whoſoever ſhall confeſs me before Men, him will I alſo confeſs before my Father which*

is

is in Heaven: But whoſoever ſhall deny me before Men, him will I alſo deny before my Father which is in Heaven. And this by St. *Mark* is expreſs'd by *being aſhamed of Chriſt*; that is, afraid and aſhamed to make an open profeſſion of him, and his Religon; *Mark* 8. 38. *Whoſoever therefore ſhall be aſhamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and ſinful generation, of him alſo ſhall the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.* Serm. XIV.

And this likewiſe was the Caſe of the Primitive Chriſtians under the moderate Emperors, when the Perſecution of them was not ſo hot, as to drive them to a denial of Chriſt, provided they would be contented to conceal and diſſemble their Religion, in that caſe they did not hunt them out, nor Proſecute them to renounce their Religion, if they made no diſcovery of themſelves. But yet they who ſuffered, becauſe they would not conceal their Profeſſion of Chriſtianity, did truly ſuffer for the Cauſe of Religion.

Thirdly

Vol. III. *Thirdly*, Men do likewiſe truly ſuffer for the Cauſe of Religion, when they ſuffer for not betraying it, by any indirect and unworthy means; ſuch as among the Primitive Chriſtians was the delivering up their Bibles to the Heathen, to be burnt and deſtroyed by them: For to give up that Holy Book, which is the great Inſtrument of our Religion, is in effect to give up Chriſtianity it ſelf, and to Conſent to the utter extirpation of it.

And ſuch likewiſe is the Caſe of thoſe, who ſuffer in any kind for not contributing to break down the Fences of Religion in any Nation, where the Providence of God hath given it a Legal Eſtabliſhment and Security; or, in a word, for refuſing to countenance and further any Deſign, which viſibly tends to the Ruine of Religion: For to deſtroy Religion, and to take away that which hinders the Deſtruction of it, are in Effect much the ſame thing.

Fourthly,

Serm. XV.

Fourthly, Men do truly ſuffer for the Cauſe of Religion, when they ſuffer for the Maintenance and Defence of any neceſſary and Fundamental Article of it, tho' they be not required to renounce the whole Chriſtian Religion; For what St. *Paul* ſays of the Article of *the Reſurrection of the dead*, is true of any other neceſſary Article of the Chriſtian Religion, that the Denyal of it, is a Subverſion of the whole Chriſtian Faith; becauſe it tends directly to the overthrowing of Chriſtianity, being a Wound given to it in a Vital and Eſſential Part. And this was the Caſe of thoſe, who in any Age of Chriſtianity have been perſecuted by *Hereticks*, for the Defence of any Article of Chriſtianity.

And I cannot but obſerve by the Way, that after the Heathen Perſecutions were ceaſed, Perſecution was firſt begun among the Chriſtians by *Hereticks*; and hath ſince been taken up, and carried much beyond that bad Pattern, by the Church of *Rome*; which, beſides a ſtanding *Inquiſition* in all Countries,

tries, which are entirely of that Religion; (a Court, the like whereto, for the clancular and ſecret Manner of Proceeding, for the unjuſt and arbitrary Rules of it, for the barbarous Uſage of Mens Perſons, and the Cruelty of its Torments, to extort Confeſſions from them, the Sun never ſaw erected under any Government in the World, by Men of any Religion whatſoever) I ſay, which, beſides this Court, hath by frequent *Croiſadoes* for the Extirpation of Hereticks, and by many Bloody *Maſſacres* in *France* and *Ireland*, and ſeveral other places, deſtroyed far greater numbers of Chriſtians, than all the ten Heathen, Perſecutions; and hath of late revived, and to this very Day continues the ſame or greater Cruelties, and a fiercer Perſecution of Proteſtants, if all the Circumſtances of it be conſidered, than was ever yet practiſed upon them; and yet whilſt this is doing almoſt before our eyes, in one of our next neighbour Nations, they have the Face to complain of the Cannibal Laws, and bloody Perſecutions of the Church of *England*; and the Confidence to ſet up for

for the great Patrons of Liberty of Conſcience, and Enemies of all Compulſion and Force in Matters of Religion. Serm. XIV.

Fifthly, Men do truly ſuffer for the Cauſe of God and Religion, when they ſuffer for aſſerting and maintaining the Purity of the Chriſtian Doctrine and Worſhip; and for oppoſing and not complying with thoſe groſs Errors and Corruptions, which Superſtition and Ignorance had in a long Courſe of Time brought into the Chriſtian Religion. Upon this Account many Good People ſuffered in many paſt Ages, for reſiſting the growing Errors and Corruptions, of the Church of *Rome*, which at firſt crept in by Degrees, but at laſt broke in like a mighty Flood, which carried down all before it, and threatned Ruin and Deſtruction to all that oppoſed them. Upon this Account alſo, infinite Numbers ſuffered among the *Waldenſes* and *Albigenſes*, in *Bohemia*, and in *England*, and in moſt other Countries in this *Weſtern* Part of Chriſtendom. And they who ſuffered upon this Account,

Vol. III. suffer'd in a good Cause, and for the Testimony of the Truth.

Sixthly, and *Lastly*, Men do truly suffer for the cause of Religion, when they suffer for not disclaming and renouncing any clear and undoubted Truth of God whatsoever; yea though it be not a Fundamental Point and Article of Religion.

And this is the Case of those many Thousands, who ever since the IV. Council of *Lateran*, which was in the Year 1215, (when *Transubstantiation* was first defin'd to be an Article of Faith, and necessary to Salvation to be believ'd) were persecuted with Fire and Sword, for not understanding those words of our Saviour, *this is my Body*, (which are so easily capable of a reasonable Sense) in the absurd and impossible Sense of *Transubstantiation*. And though this Disowing of this Doctrine, be no express and direct Article of the Christian Religion; yet it is a Fundamental Articlee of right Reason and common Sense: Because the admitting of *Transubstantiation*, does undermine

undermine the Foundation of all Certainty whatſoever, and does more immediatly ſhake the very Foundation of Chriſtianity it ſelf. Yea, tho' the Chriſtian Religion were no ways concerned in this Doctrine, yet out of reverence to Reaſon and Truth, and a juſt animoſity and indignation at confident nonſenſe, a Man of an honeſt and generous Mind would as ſoon be brought to Declare or Swear, that twice two do not make four, but five, as to profeſs his belief of *Tranſubſtantiation.* Serm. XIV.

And tho' all Truths are not of equal Conſequence and Concernment, yet all Truth is of God; and for that Reaſon, tho' we are not obliged to make an open profeſſion of all Truths at all times, yet we are bound not to deny or renounce any Truth, nor to make profeſſion of a known Falſehood or Error: For it is meerly becauſe of the intrinſical Evil of the thing, that *it is impoſſible for God to lie*; and the Son of God thought it worth his coming into the World, and laying down his Life, *to bear witneſs to the Truth.* So

he himſelf tells us, *Joh.* 18. 37. *To this End was I born, and for this Cauſe came I into the World, that I ſhould bear witneſs to the Truth.*

Thus have I ſhewn you in theſe plain Inſtances (to which moſt other Caſes may be reduced) when Men may be ſaid to ſuffer truly for the Cauſe of Religion, and Truth.

I ſhall mention two or three Caſes wherein Men may ſeem to ſuffer for the Cauſe of Religion, but cannot truly be ſaid to do ſo.

Firſt, When Men raſhly expoſe themſelves to danger, and run upon ſufferings for the ſake of Religion. Thus ſeveral of the Primitive Chriſtians voluntarily expoſed themſelves when they were not called in queſtion, and in the heat of their Affection and Zeal for God and Religion, offered themſelves to Martyrdom, when none enquired after them. This, in the gracious interpretation of God, who knowing the ſincerity of their Zeal, was pleaſed to overlook the indiſcreet

diſcreet forwardneſs and raſhneſs of it, might be accepted for a kind of *Martyrdom*: but cannot in reaſon be juſtified, ſo as to be fit to be made a Pattern, and to be recommended to our imitation. For though God may be pleaſed to excuſe the weakneſs of a well-meaning Zeal; yet he can approve nothing but what is Reaſonable. Serm. XIV.

To ſuffer chearfully for the Cauſe of God and his Truth, when he calls us *to fight this good fight of faith*, and *to reſiſt unto blood*; and when we are reduced to that ſtrait, that we muſt either die for God and his Truth, or deny them; to ſuffer I ſay in this Caſe with Courage and Patience, is one of the Nobleſt of all the Chriſtian Virtues. But to be perfect Volunteers, and to run our ſelves upon Sufferings, when we are not called to them, looks rather like *the Sacrifice of Fools*; which tho' God may mercifully excuſe, and pardon the Evil of the Action, for the good Meaning of it; yet he can never perfectly approve and accept of it. But I think there is little need now-

a-days to caution Men againſt this raſhneſs; it is well if they have the Grace and Reſolution to ſuffer when it is their Duty, and when they are called to it.

Secondly, Nor can Men be truly ſaid to ſuffer for the Cauſe of Religion, when they ſuffer not for their Faith, but their Fancy, and for the wilful and affected Error of a miſtaken Conſcience. As when Men ſuffer for indifferent things, which in heat and paſſion they call *Superſtition* and *Idolatry?* and for their own falſe Opinions in Religion, which they miſtake for *Fundamental Articles* of the Chriſtian Faith. In this Caſe, their miſtake about theſe things will not change the Nature of them, nor turn their Sufferings into Martyrdom; and yet many Men have certainly ſuffered for their own miſtakes. For as Men may be ſo far deluded, *as to think they do God good ſervice, when they kill his faithful Servants*; ſo likewiſe may they be ſo far deceived, as to Sacrifice their Lives, and all that is dear to them, to their own culpable Errors and Miſtakes.

But

But this is Zeal without Knowledge, not *the wiſdom which deſcends from above*, but that which comes from beneath, and is like the Fire of Hell, which is heat without light. Serm. XIV.

Thirdly, and *Laſtly*; Nor can Men truly be ſaid to ſuffer for the Cauſe of God and Religion, when they Suffer for the open Profeſſion and Defence of Truths not neceſſary. For tho' a Man be obliged to make an open Profeſſion of all *Fundamental* and *Neceſſary Truths*; yet he is under no ſuch Obligation to make Profeſſion of Truths *not neceſſary* at all times; and unleſs he be called to deny them, he is not bound either to declare or defend them; he may hold his peace at other times, and be ſilent about them, eſpecially when the open Profeſſion of them will probably do no good to others, and will certainly do hurt to our ſelves, and the zealous endeavour to propagate ſuch Truths will be to the greater prejudice of Charity, and the diſturbance of the publick Peace of the Church.

Vol. III. It was a good Saying of *Eraſmus* (if we underſtand it, as I believe he meant it, of Truths not neceſſary) *adeo inviſæ ſunt mihi diſcordiæ, ut veritas etiam contentioſa diſpliceat*: *I am* (ſays he) *ſo perfect a hater of diſcord, that I am even diſpleaſed with Truth, when it is the occaſion of contention.* As a Man is never to deny Truth, ſo neither is he obliged to make an open Profeſſion of Truths not neceſſary, at all times; and if he ſuffer upon that account, he cannot juſtifie it to his own Prudence, nor have Comfort in ſuch Sufferings; becauſe he brings them needleſly upon himſelf; and no Man can have Comfort, but in Suffering for doing his Duty.

And thus I have done with the *firſt* Thing I propoſed to enquire into; namely, when Men may be truly ſaid to Suffer for the Cauſe of Religion?

I proceed now to the

II. Enquiry; namely, how far Men may rely upon the Providence of

of God, to bear them out in ſuch Sufferings? Serm. XIV.

To which I Anſwer; That provided we do what becomes us, and is our Duty on our part, the Providence of God will not be wanting on his part, to bear us out in all our Sufferings for his Cauſe, one of theſe *three* ways.

Firſt, To ſecure us from that violent degree of Temptation and Suffering, which would be too ſtrong for Humane Strength and Patience; Or,

Secondly, In caſe of ſuch extraordinary Temptation and Trial, to give us the extraordinary Supports and Comforts of his Holy Spirit; or elſe,

Thirdly, In caſe of a Temporary Fall and Miſcarriage, to raiſe us up by Repentance, and a greater Reſolution and Conſtancy under Sufferings. I ſhall ſpeak ſeverally to theſe.

Firſt,

Firſt, Either the Providence of God will not be wanting to ſecure us from that violent degree of Temptation and Suffering, which would be too ſtrong for Humane Strength and Patience to bear. And this is a great ſecurity to good Men, againſt the fears of a final Miſcarriage, after all their Labours, and Pains, and Sufferings in a Religious Courſe, by being over-born at laſt by the aſſault of a very violent and powerful Temptation. Not but that the beſt of Men ought always to have a prudent diſtruſt of themſelves, ſo as to keep them from ſecurity; according to the Apoſtle's Caution and Counſel; *be not high-minded, but fear*; and *let him that ſtands, take heed leſt he fall*; becauſe, 'till we come to Heaven, we ſhall never be out of the danger and poſſibility of falling: But yet for all this, we may hope, by the ſincerity and firmneſs of our Reſolution, under the uſual influences of God's Grace, to *acquit our ſelves like Men*, in ordinary Caſes of Temptation and Suffering.

And

Serm. XIV.

And to this end, we ſhould repreſent to our ſelves *thoſe exceeding great and precious Promiſes*, which he hath made to Good Men, and his merciful Providence, which continually watcheth over them, and ſteers their courſe for them in this World, among thoſe many Rocks which they are in Danger to ſplit upon; that he is able *to ſtabliſh us in the Truth*, and to keep us from falling, and *to preſent us faultleſs before the preſence of his Glory with exceeding joy, and to preſerve us to his heavenly Kingdom*; and that if we do not forſake him, and forfeit his Care and Protection, he will *keep us by his mighty power through faith unto Salvation*; either by his merciful Foreſight and Prevention of thoſe Temptations, which would probably be too hard for us; or if he thinks fit they ſhould befal us, by ſupporting us under them in an extraordinary Manner.

For I doubt not, but that the beſt Men do own their Security and Perſeverance in Goodneſs, much more to the merciful Providence of God, pre-

Vol. III. preventing the Aſſaults of violent and dangerous Temptations, than to the Firmneſs and Conſtancy of their own Reſolutions. For there are very few Perſons of ſo firm and reſolute Virtue, but that one time or other, a Temptation might aſſault them upon ſuch a Diſadvantage, as would in all probability not only ſtagger them, but bear them down. Now herein the Providence of God towards good Men is very remarkable, in ſecuring them from thoſe Temptations which are too ſtrong for them to grapple withal; like a kind and tender Father, who, if he be ſatisfied of the dutiful Diſpoſition of his Child towards him, will not try his Obedience to the utmoſt, nor permit too ſtrong a Temptation to the contrary to come in his way. So the *Pſalmiſt* repreſents God's tender Regard and Conſideration of the Frailty and Infirmity of his Children, *Pſal.* 103. 13, 14. *Like as a Father pitieth his Children, ſo the Lord pitieth them that fear him: For he knoweth our frame, he remembreth that we are duſt*; that is, he conſidereth us as Men, and deals with us accordingly. Provided we be ſincere, he

he will not ſuffer us to be ſet upon by Temptations that are too big for us. And therefore our bleſſed Saviour makes it one of the Petitions of that excellent Prayer, which he hath recommended to us; *Lead us not into Temptation*; that is, we ſhould every day beg of God, that his Providence would keep us out of the Way of great and dangerous Temptations, as knowing that this will be a greater Security to us, than any ſtrength and reſolution of our own. Serm. XIV.

Secondly, Or in caſe of ſuch violent and extraordinary Temptations, the Providence of God will not be wanting to give us the extraordinary Support and Comfort of his Holy Spirit, to bear us up under them. The Providence of God did take Care of Good Men in all Ages, and did afford Comfort to them, under great Tryals and Sufferings; but God never made ſo expreſs and general a Promiſe of this, to all good Men, as he hath done by the Chriſtian Religion. Never was ſo conſtant a Preſence and Influence of the Divine Spirit vouchſafed and aſſured to

Men

Men under any diſpenſation, as that of the Goſpel; wherein the Spirit of God is promiſed to all that ſincerely embrace the Chriſtian Religion, to reſide and dwell in them; not only to all the purpoſes of Sanctification and Holineſs, but of Support and Comfort under the heavieſt Preſſures and Sufferings. For which Reaſon the *Goſpel* is called *the Miniſtration of the Spirit*; and is upon this account ſaid to be *more Glorious* than any other Revelation which God had ever made to Mankind.

We are naturally apt to be very much diſheartned and caſt down at the apprehenſion of great Sufferings, from the conſideration of our own weakneſs and frailty; but the Spirit of Chriſt dwells in all true Chriſtians, and the ſame Glorious Power, which raiſed up Jeſus from the dead, works mightily in them that believe. St. *Paul* uſeth very high Expreſſions about this Matter, *Eph.* 1. 19. *That ye may know*, (ſaith he, ſpeaking to all Chriſtians) *what is the exceeding greatneſs of his power to us-ward who believe, according to*

to the working of his mighty power, Serm.
which he wrought in Chriſt, when he rai- XIV.
ſed him from the dead, and ſet him at his own right hand. So that every Chriſtian is endowed with a kind of *Omnipotence, being able* (as St. *Paul* ſpeaks of himſelf) *to do* and to endure *all things, through Chriſt ſtrengthening him.* Of our ſelves we are very weak, and the Temptations and Terrors of the World are very powerful; but there is a Principle reſiding in every true Chriſtian, that is able to bear us up againſt the World, and the power of all its Temptations. *Whatſoever is born of God* (ſaith St. *John*) *overcometh the world; for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World.* The Holy Spirit of God which dwells in all true Chriſtians, is a more powerful Principle of Reſolution, and Courage, and Patience under the ſharpeſt Trials and Sufferings, than that Evil Spirit which rules in the World is, to ſtir up and ſet on the Malice and Rage of the World againſt us. *Ye are of God, little Children* (he ſpeaks this to the youngeſt and weakeſt Chriſtians) *Ye are of God, little Children, and have overcome,*

VOL. III. *overcome; becauſe greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World.* The Malice and Power of the Devil is very great; but the Goodneſs and Power of God is greater. And therefore in caſe of extraordinary Temptation, good Men, by virtue of this Promiſe of God's Holy Spirit, may expect to be born up and comforted in a very extraordinary and ſupernatural manner, under the greateſt Tribulations and Sufferings for Righteouſneſs ſake.

And this was in a very ſignal and remarkble manner afforded to the Primitive Chriſtians, under thoſe Fierce and Cruel Perſecutions to which they were expoſed. And this may ſtill be expected, in like Caſes of extraordinary Sufferings for the Teſtimony of God's Truth. *If ye be reproached* (ſaith St. *Peter*, in this 4th *Chap. ver.* 14.) *for the Name of Chriſt, happy are ye; for the Spirit of Glory and of God reſteth upon you.* The Spirit of God is here promiſed to ſtrengthen and ſupport all that Suffer for the Name of Chriſt, in a very conſpicuous and glorious manner, according to that Prayer of St. *Paul*,

Serm. XIV.

Paul, *Col.* 1. 11. That Chriſtians might be *ſtrengthened with all might, according to God's Glorious Power, unto all Patience, and Long-ſuffering, with joyfulneſs.* For when God is pleaſed to exerciſe good Men with Trials more than Humane, and ſuch Sufferings as are beyond the common rate of Humane Strength and Patience to bear, he hath engaged himſelf to endue and aſſiſt them with more than Humane Courage, and Reſolution. So St. *Paul* tells the *Corinthians*, who had not then felt the utmoſt rage of Perſecution, 1 *Cor.* 10. 13. *No Temptation or Trial hath* yet *befallen you, but what is common to Man*; that is, nothing but what is frequently incident to Humane Nature, and what by humane ſtrength, with an ordinary aſſiſtance of God's Grace, may be grapled withal. *But*, in caſe God ſhall call you to extraordinary Sufferings, *he is faithful that hath promiſed, who will not ſuffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape, that ye may be able to bear it*; that is, as he hath ordered and appointed ſo great a Temptation or Trial to befall you, ſo he will take care that it ſhall have a

Vol. III. happy Iſſue, by enabling you to bear it, by affording you grace and ſtrength equal to the violence and power of the Temptation. For, as *he* is ſaid *to fall into Temptation*, that is Conquered by it; ſo he is ſaid *to get out of it*, or *eſcape it*, who is enabled to bear it, and, in ſo doing, gets the better of it. And for this we may rely upon the Faithfulneſs of God, who hath Promiſed *that we ſhall not be tried above our ſtrength*; either not above the ſtrength which we have, or not above the ſtrength which he will afford us in ſuch a Caſe.

And why then ſhould we be daunted at the apprehenſion of any Suffering whatſoever, if we be ſecured that our Comfort ſhall be encreaſed in proportion to our Trouble, and our ſtrength in proportion to the ſharpneſs and weight of our Sufferings? Or elſe,

Thirdly, In caſe of Temporary falling, the Providence and Goodneſs of God will give them the Grace and Opportunity of recovering themſelves from their Fall by Repentance. For the

the Providence of God may ſometimes, for wiſe Ends and Reaſons, ſee it fit to leave good Men to their own Frailty, and to faint and fall ſhamefully under Sufferings, ſo as to renounce and deny the Truth; ſometimes to puniſh their vain Confidence in themſelves, as in the Caſe of *Peter*, who declared more Reſolution, and bare it out with a greater Confidence than any of the Diſciples, when he ſaid to our Saviour, *tho' all men forſake thee, yet will not I*; and yet after this he fell more ſhamefully than any of the reſt, ſo as to deny his Maſter with horrid Oaths and Imprecations, and *this*, tho' our Saviour had prayed particularly for him, *that his Faith might not fail.* From which Inſtance we may learn, that God doth not engage himſelf abſolutely to ſecure Good Men from falling, in caſe of a great Temptation and Tryal; but if they be ſincere, he will not permit them to fall finally, though he may ſuffer them to miſcarry grievouſly for a time, to convince them of the vanity of their Confidence in themſelves and their own Strength. Serm. XIV.

Sometimes God may ſuffer Good Men to fall, in order to their more glorious Recovery, and the greater Demonſtration and Triumph of their Faith and Conſtancy afterwards; which was the Caſe of that happy Inſtrument of our Reformation here in *England*, Arch-biſhop *Cranmer*, who after he had been ſo great a Champion of the Reformation, was ſo evercome with Fear, upon the Apprehenſion of his approaching Sufferings, as to ſubſcribe thoſe Errors of the Church of *Rome*, which he had ſo ſtoutly oppoſed a great part of his Life: But he did not long continue in this State, but by the Grace of God, which had not forſaken him, was brought to Repentance; and when he came to ſuffer, gave ſuch a Teſtimony of it, and of his Faith and Conſtancy, as was more glorious, and more to the Confirmation of the Faith of others, than a ſimple Martyrdom could have been, if he had not fallen; for when he was brought to the Stake, he put his right Hand (with which he had ſigned his Recantation) into the Fire, and with an undaunted Conſtancy

cy held it there, till it was quite burnt, for a Teſtimony of his true Repentance for that foul Miſcarriage; and when he had done, gave the reſt of his Body to be burnt, which he endured with great Courage and Chearfulneſs to the laſt. So that he made all the amends poſſible for ſo great a Fault; and the Goodneſs of God, and the Power of his Grace was more glorified in his Repentance and Recovery, than if he had never fallen. Serm. XIV.

But what ſhall we ſay, when notwithſtanding theſe Promiſes of extraordinary Comfort and Support, in caſe of extraordinary Sufferings, ſo great Numbers are ſeen to faint in the day of Trial, and to fall off from their Stedfaſtneſs? Of which there were many ſad Inſtances, among the Primitive Chriſtians, and have likewiſe been of late in our own Times, and in places nearer to us. This I confeſs is a very melancholy Conſideration, but yet I think is capable of a ſufficient Anſwer.

VOL. III. And *firſt* of all, let this be eſtabliſh'd for a firm and undoubted Principle, *that God is faithful to his Promiſe*; and therefore we ought much rather to ſuppoſe in all theſe Caſes, that there is ſome Default on our part, than any Failure and Unfaithfulneſs on God's Part. Thus St. *Paul*, determines in a like Caſe, when the Promiſe of God ſeemed not to be made good to the *Jews*, he lays the Blame of it on their Unbelief, but acquits God of any Unfaithfulneſs in his Promiſe, *Rom.* 3. 3, 4. *For what if ſome did not believe, ſhall their unbelief make the Faith* (or *Fidelity*) *of God without effect? God forbid: Yea, let God be true, but every man a lyar.* This I confeſs does not anſwer the Difficulty; but yet it ought to incline and diſpoſe us, to interpret what can fairly be offer'd for the Removal of it, with all the Favour that may be on God's ſide. I ſay then,

Secondly, That when good Men fall in Caſe of extraordinary Temptation, and recover again by Repentance, and give greater demonſtration afterwards of

of their Conſtancy and Reſolution, in the Cauſe of God and his Truth, the Faithfulneſs of God in his Promiſes is ſufficiently vindicated, as in the Caſes I mentioned: becauſe the Promiſe of God is not abſolute, that good Men ſhall be preſerv'd from falling; but that *the Temptation ſhall have a happy iſſue*, and that they ſhall not *finally* miſcarry. For Promiſes of this Nature are to be interpreted by us, and underſtood as we do our Saviour's Prayer for *Peter* before his Fall, *that his faith ſhould not fail* finally; but though he fell through too much Confidence in himſelf, he ſhould, through the Grace of God aſſiſting him be enabled to recover by Repentance. Serm. XIV.

Thirdly, The Sincerity or Inſincerity of Men in the Profeſſion of the true Religon, is a thing which we cannot certainly know, becauſe we do not ſee into Mens Hearts; but *he who knows the heart*, and *trys the Spirits of Men in a Ballance*, cannot be deceived in this Matter; and where Men are not ſincere, the Promiſe of God is not concerned to hinder them from

Vol. III.

discovering themselves; and the Fall of such Persons, is no Reflection upon the Faithfulness of God. And it is reasonable enough to presume, that this may be the Case of not a few, and that (like *Simon Magus*) after they have made a very solemn Profession of Christianity, *their hearts may not be right in the sight of God.*

Fourthly, If we put the Case at the hardest, that some that were very sincere, after they have held out a great while, under the Extremity of Torments, have at last fainted under them, and yielded to the Malice and Cruelty of their Persecutors, and in this Amazement and Distraction have not long after expired, without any Testimony of their Repentance; In this Case, both Reason and Charity ought to restrain us from passing any very positive and severe Sentence upon the State of such persons. For what do we know, but God whose Goodness will certainly make all the Allowance to Human Frailty that Reason can require; (*For he knows whereof we are made; and remembers that*

that we are but duſt; he mercifully conſiders every Man's Caſe, and weighs all the Circumſtances of it in an exact Ballance;) I ſay who can tell, but that in ſuch a Caſe as I have mentioned, God may graciouſly be pleaſed to accept ſuch a degree of conſtant Suffering of great Torments for ſo long a time, for a true *Martyrdom*, and not expect a more than Humane Patience and Reſolution, where he is not pleaſed to afford more than Humane Strength and Support; and whether he may not look upon their failing and miſcarriage at laſt, in the ſame rank with the indeliberate Actions of Men in a Frenzy, and beſides themſelves? Serm. XIV.

And thus God may be ſaid *with the temptation to make a way to eſcape*, or, *to give a happy iſſue to it*; ſince they were *enabled to bear it*, 'till being Diſtracted by their Torments, their Underſtandings were thrown off the hinges, and incapable of exerciſing any deliberate Acts of Reaſon. And without ſome ſuch equitable Conſideration of the Caſe of ſuch Perſons, it will be very hard to reconcile ſome appear-

ances

ances of Things which the Goodneſs of God, and the Faithfulneſs of his Promiſe.

However, it will become us to abſtain from all uncharitableneſs and peremptory cenſure of the final Eſtate of ſuch Perſons, eſpecially 'till we our ſelves have given greater and better Teſtimony of our Conſtancy; and in the mean time, to leave them to the Righteous and Merciful Sentence of *their* Maſter and *ours*, to whoſe Judgment we muſt all ſtand or fall.

I am ſure it will very ill become thoſe, who by the Providence of God have eſcaped thoſe Sufferings, and are at preſent out of danger themſelves, to ſit in Judgment upon thoſe who are left to endure this terrible Conflict, and have perhaps held out as long, or longer, than they themſelves would have done in the like Circumſtances. Let us rather earneſtly beg of *the God of all grace and patience*, that he would endue us with a greater meaſure of Patience and Conſtancy, if he ſee fit to call us to the exerciſe of it; and (which we lawfully

lawfully may, after the Example of our Bleſſed Saviour) that *if it be his will, he would let this Cup paſs from us*, and not try us with the like Sufferings, *leſt we alſo be weary, and faint in our Minds.* I come now to the Serm. XIV.

III. and Laſt Enquiry which I propoſed; What Ground and Reaſon there is, for good Men to expect the more Peculiar and Eſpecial Care of God's Providence in eaſe of ſuch Sufferings?

The Providence of God extends to all his Creatures, according to that of the Pſalmiſt, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his Works.* But he exerciſeth a more particular Providence towards Mankind; and more peculiar yet towards thoſe who Study to pleaſe him, by obeying his Laws and doing his Will. He that is aſſured of his own Heart, that he loves God, and would do or ſuffer any thing for him, can have no cauſe to doubt but that God loves him, and is concerned for his Happineſs. No Man was ever afraid of God, that

was

was not conſcious to himſelf that he had offended him, and by the wilful breach of his Laws had put himſelf out of the Care of his Providence. But on the contrary, if our Hearts give us this Teſtimony, That we have made it our ſincere Endeavour to pleaſe him, we are naturally apt to have good aſſurance and confidence of his Favour and Good-will towards us. This comfort the Mind of every good Man is apt to give him, from his own Reaſon and the natural Notions which he hath of God.

But to free us from all doubt in this Matter, God himſelf hath told us ſo, and given us plentiful Aſſurance of it in his Word, *Pſal.* 11. 7. *The Righteous Lord loveth Righteouſneſs, his countenance doth behold the upright*; that is, he will be favourable unto them. *Pſal.* 33. 18. *Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy. The eye of God*, ſignifies *his watchful Care and Providence over good Men.* So that beſides the ſure and well-grounded Reaſonings, from the Eſſential Perfections of the Divine

Divine Nature, the Mercy and Goodneſs of God; *we have a more ſure word of Promiſe*, in the expreſs declarations of God's Word, and more particularly in the caſe of great Temptations and Sufferings. For can we think, that the Scripture ſaith in vain, *Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and he ſhall ſtrengthen thine heart? Many are the afflictions of the Righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all? The ſteps of a good Man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways; tho' he fall he ſhall not utterly be caſt down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand? The Salvation of the Righteous cometh of the Lord, he is their help in time of trouble?* The ſame Promiſes we find in the New Teſtament. *All things ſhall work together for good, to them that love God. God is faithful, who hath promiſed, that he will not ſuffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way to eſcape.* And to mention no more; *Hold faſt the Profeſſion of your Faith without wavering, he is faithful that hath Promiſed*; *viz.* to ſupport you under Sufferings, and to reward them. Serm. XIV.

Thus

Thus much for the *first* Point, namely, that when Men do suffer truly for the Cause of Religion, they may with confidence commit themselves to the more Peculiar Care of the Divine Providence.

SERMON

SERMON XV.

The Support of Good Men, under their Sufferings for Religion.

The Second Sermon on

1 PETER IV. 19.

Wherefore, let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

FROM theſe words I propoſed to Conſider theſe *three* Points.

Firſt, That when Men do Suffer really and truly for the Cauſe of Religion, they may with confidence commit themſelves (their Lives, and all that

Vol III. that is dear to them) to the peculiar and more especial Care of the Divine Providence.

Secondly, This we may do always, provided that we be careful of our Duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid Sufferings, nor to rescue our selves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our Duty and a good Conscience; for this is the meaning of *committing our selves to God in well-doing.*

Thirdly, To shew what Ground of Comfort and Encouragement the Consideration of God, under the Notion of *a Faithful Creator*, does afford to us, under all our Sufferings for a good Cause and a good Conscience.

The *First* of these Points I have treated on at large in my former Discourse. I proceed now to the

Second, Namely, when in all our Sufferings for the Cause of Religion, we may with Confidence and good Assurance, commit our selves to the peculiar and more especial Care of God's

God's Providence? This is to be understood, always provided that we be careful of our Duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid Sufferings, nor to reſcue our ſelves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our Duty and a good Conſcience. And this I told you was the meaning of *committing our ſelves to God in well doing*; for if we either neglect our Duty, or ſtep out of the Way of it, by doing things contrary to it, the Providence of God will not be concern'd to bear us out in ſuch Sufferings. So that in our Sufferings for the Cauſe of God and Religion, *to commit our ſelves to him in well-doing*, may reaſonably comprehend in it theſe following Particulars. Serm. XV.

1. Provided always, that we neglect no lawful Means of our Preſervation from Sufferings, or our Deliverance out of them: In this Caſe Men do not commit themſelves to the Providence of God, but caſt themſelves out of his Care and Protection; they do not truſt God, but tempt him, and do as it were try whether he will

Vol. III. ſtand by us, when we deſert our ſelves; and bring us out of Trouble, when we would take no Care, would uſe no Endeavours to prevent it. If we will needleſly provoke Trouble, and run our ſelves upon ſuffering; if we will neglect our ſelves, and the Lawful Means of our preſervation; if we will give up, and part with thoſe Securities of our Religion, which the Providence of God, and the Laws of our Country have given us; if we our ſelves will help to pull down the Fence which is about us; if we will diſarm our ſelves, and by our own Act expoſe our ſelves naked and open to Danger and Sufferings; why ſhould we think in this Caſe, that God will help us, when we would not help our ſelves, by thoſe Lawful Ways, which the Providence of God had put into our hands?

All Truſt in God and Dependance upon his Providence, does imply, that we joyn Prayer and Endeavour together; Faith in God, and a prudent and diligent uſe of Means: If we lazily truſt the Providence of God, and ſo *caſt all our Care upon him*, as to take none at all our ſelves, God will take no

no Care of us. In vain do we rely upon the Wiſdom and Goodneſs, and Power of God; in vain do we importune and tire Heaven with our Prayers, to help us againſt our Enemies and Perſecutors, if we our ſelves will do nothing for our ſelves: In vain do we hope that God will maintain and defend our Religion, againſt all the ſecret Contrivances and open Aſſaults of our Enemies, if we who are united in the Profeſſion of the ſame Religion, and in all the Eſſentials of Faith and Worſhip, will for ſome ſmall Differences in leſſer Matters, which are of no moment, in Compariſon of the things wherein we are agreed: I ſay, if for ſuch ſlight Matters, we will divide and fall out among our ſelves; if when the Enemy is at the Gates, we will ſtill purſue our Heats and Animoſities, and will madly keep open thoſe Breaches, which were fooliſhly made at firſt; what can we expect, but that the Common Enemy ſhould take the Advantage, and enter in at them; and whilſt we are ſo unſeaſonably and ſenſeleſly contending with one another, that they ſhould take the Sermn. XIV.

VOL. III. Opportunity which we give them, to deſtroy us all.

2. Provided likewiſe, that we do not attempt our own Preſervation or Deliverance from Suffering, by evil and unlawful means: We muſt do nothing that is contrary to our Duty, and to a good Conſcience; nor comply with any thing, or lend our helping Hand thereto, that apparently tends to the Ruin of our Religion, neither to divert and put off Sufferings for the preſent, nor to reſcue our ſelves from under them; becauſe we cannot with Confidence commit our ſelves to the Providence of God, but *in well-doing.*

This is an Eternal Rule, from whence we muſt in no Caſe depart, *That men muſt do nothing contrary to the Rules and Precepts of Religion, no not for the ſake of Religion it ſelf:* We muſt not break any Law of God, nor diſobey the lawful Commands of lawful Authority, to free our ſelves from any Sufferings whatſoever; becauſe the Goodneſs of no End can ſanctifie Evil Means, and make them Lawful: We muſt not *ſpeak deceitfully for God*, nor

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lye, no not *for the Truth*; nor *kill men*, Serm.
though we could thereby *do God and* XV.
Religion the greateſt Service. And tho' all the Caſuiſts in the World ſhould teach the contrary Doctrine, (as they generally do in the Church of *Rome*) yet I would not doubt to oppoſe to all thoſe the ſingle Authority of St. *Paul*, who expreſly condemns this Principle, and brands it for a *damnable* Doctrine, *that Evil may be done by us, that Good may come.* Rom. 3. 8. *And not as we be ſlanderouſly reported, and as ſome affirm that we ſay, let us do evil, that good may come, whoſe damnation is juſt.* St. *Paul* it ſeems looked upon it as a moſt deviliſh Calumny, to inſinuate that the Chriſtian Religion gives the leaſt countenance to ſuch damnable Doctrines and Doings as theſe; and pronounceth *their Damnation to be juſt*, who either teach any ſuch Principle as the Doctrine of Chriſtianity, or practiſe according to it.

Let thoſe look to it, who teach, That a right Intention, and a good End, will render things, which are otherwiſe evil and unlawful, not only

Vol. III. lawful to be done by us, but in many Caſes meritorious; eſpecially where the good of the Church, and the Extirpation of Hereſie are more immediately concerned. Of this Nature are the Doctrines of Equivocation and Mental Reſervation, and the Lawfulneſs of ſuch Artificial ways of Lying, to avoid the Danger of the Law, when they are brought before Heretical Magiſtrates; and this is the common Doctrine of the moſt learned Caſuiſts of all Orders in the Church of *Rome*: And ſuch likewiſe are their Doctrines, of the Lawfulneſs of extirpating Hereticks, by the moſt barbarous and bloody Means, and of breaking Faith with them, tho' given by Emperours and Princes, in the moſt publick and ſolemn manner; both which are the avowed Doctrines of their General Councils and have frequently been put in Practice, to the Deſtruction of many millions of Chriſtians, better and more righteous than themſelves. *But we have not ſo learned Chriſt, who have heard him and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jeſus.* They who are rightly inſtruct-

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ed in the Chriſtian Religion, are ſo far from thinking it lawful to do any thing that is evil, to bring others under ſuffering, that they do not allow it in any Caſe whatſoever, no not for the Cauſe of God and Religion, and to free themſelves from the greateſt Sufferings that can be inflicted upon them. Serm. XV.

3. Provided alſo, that we do truſt the Providence of God, and do indeed *commit our ſelves* to it; relying upon his Wiſdom and Goodneſs, and entirely ſubmitting and reſigning up our ſelves to his Will and Diſpoſal, both as to the Degree and the Duration of our Sufferings; believing that he will do that for us, which upon the whole matter, and in the final iſſue and reſult of things, will be beſt for us. That Bleſſing, wherewith *Moſes* the Man of God bleſt the People of *Iſrael* before his Death, doth belong to good Men in all Ages: *He loveth his People*, and *all his Saints are in his hand*: Deut. 33. 3. Innumerable are the Promiſes in Scripture concerning the merciful Providence and Goodneſs of God, towards thoſe *who truſt in him, and hope*

in his Mercy. Pſal. 32. 10. *Many ſorrows ſhall be to the wicked: But he that truſteth in the Lord, mercy ſhall compaſs him about.* Pſal. 33. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. *Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him: Upon them that hope in his mercy: To deliver their ſoul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our ſoul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our ſhield. For our heart ſhall rejoyce in him: Becauſe we have truſted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.* Pſal. 34. 22. *The Lord redeemeth the ſoul of his ſervants: And none of them that truſt in him ſhall be deſolate.* Pſal. 37. 39, 40. *But the ſalvation of the Righteous is of the Lord, he is their ſtrength in the time of trouble. And the Lord ſhall help them and deliver them: He ſhall deliver them from the wicked, and ſave them becauſe they truſt in him.* Pſal. 31. 19. *O how great is thy goodneſs, which thou haſt laid up for them that fear thee; which thou haſt wrought for them that truſt in thee before the Sons of men!* Pſal. 55. 22. *Caſt thy burden upon the Lord, and he ſhall ſuſtain thee: He ſhall never ſuffer the righteous to be moved.* Pſal. 125. 1.

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Serm. XV.

They that truſt in the Lord ſhall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. Eſa. 26. 3, 4, *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whoſe mind is ſtayed on thee, becauſe he truſteth in thee. Truſt ye in the Lord for ever: For in the Lord Jehovah is everlaſting ſtrength.*

4. Provided yet further, that we pray earneſtly to God for his Gracious Help and Aſſiſtance, for his merciful Comfort and Support under Sufferings; that he would be pleaſed to ſtrengthen our Faith, and to encreaſe and lengthen out our Patience, in proportion to the Degree and Duration of our Sufferings.

All the Promiſes which God hath made to us, are upon this Condition, That we earneſtly ſeek and ſue to him for the Benefit and Bleſſing of them. *Pſal.* 50. 15. *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou ſhalt glorifie me.* Ezek. 36. 37. After a great Deliverance, and many Bleſſings promiſed to them, this Condition is at laſt added, *Thus ſaith the Lord*

Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the houſe of Iſrael, to do it for them. And this likewiſe is the tenor of the Promiſes of the New Teſtament, *Mat.* 7. 7. *Ask, and it ſhall be given you: ſeek, and ye ſhall find: knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you.* And in this very Caſe that I am ſpeaking of, God expects that we ſhould apply our ſelves to him, for Spiritual Wiſdom and Grace, to behave our ſelves under Sufferings as we ought: *Jam.* 1. 2,3,4. Where ſpeaking of the manifold Temptations that Chriſtians would be exerciſed withal; he directs them to pray to God for Wiſdom to demean themſelves under Perſecutions, with Patience, and Conſtancy, and Chearfulneſs, *My Brethren, account it all joy, when ye fall into divers Temptations*; (meaning the Temptations and Tryals of Suffering in ſeveral kinds) *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work.* And becauſe this is a very difficult Duty, and requires a great deal of Spiritual Skill, to demean our ſelves under Sufferings as we ought, therefore he adds in the

the next words: *If any of you lack wiſdom, let him aſk of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it ſhall be given him.* Serm. XV.

And this earneſt application we are to make to God, for *his grace and ſeaſonable help in time of need*; not to put him in mind of his Promiſe, but to teſtifie our dependance upon him, and expectation of all good from him. And we muſt likewiſe uſe great importunity in our Prayers to God, to aſſiſt us and ſtand by us in the day of Trial, and the hour of Temptation. And therefore our Saviour heaps up ſeveral words, to denote the great earneſtneſs and importunity which we ought to uſe in Prayer, bidding us *to aſk*, and *ſeek*, and *knock*. And to ſhew that he lays more than ordinary weight upon this Matter, and to encourage our importunity, he ſpake two ſeveral Parables to this purpoſe; the firſt, *Luke* 11. 5. of the Man who by *meer importunity* prevailed with his Friend to riſe at midnight to do him a kindneſs, which our Saviour applies to encourage our importunity in Prayer, *ver.* 9.

Vol. III. *ver. 9. And I ſay unto you, ask, and it ſhall be given you; ſeek, and ye ſhall find; knock, and it ſhall be opened unto you.* The other is the Parable of the importunate Widow, and unjuſt Judge, related by the ſame Evangeliſt, *Luke* 18. 1. with this Preface to it; and *he ſpake a Parable unto them to this end, that Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* And to ſpeak the truth, they ſeem at firſt ſight two of the oddeſt of all our Saviour's Parables, if the deſign of them were to inſinuate to us that God is to be prevailed upon by the *meer importunity* of our Prayers, to grant our Requeſts: But our Bleſſed Saviour, who beſt knew his own meaning, tells us, that all he deſign'd by it, was only to ſignifie, *that we ought always to pray, and not to faint*; that is, *to continue inſtant in Prayer*, and not to give over after once asking, as if we deſpaired of prevailing. Not that *meer importunity* prevails with God to give us thoſe things which he is otherwiſe unwilling to grant; but becauſe it becomes us to be fervent, and earneſt, to teſtifie our Faith and Confidence in the Goodneſs of God, and the deep ſenſe we have of

our

our own weakneſs, and wants, and unworthineſs; and likewiſe that we ſet a true value upon the Bleſſings and Favours of God, as worth all the earneſtneſs and importunity we can uſe: And in this decent and ſober ſenſe, the ſucceſs of our Prayers may truly be ſaid to depend upon our *importunity*; not that it is neceſſary to move God to grant our Requeſts, but that it becomes us to be thus affected, that we may be the more fitly qualified for the Grace and Mercy which God is willing to confer upon us. Serm. XV.

I have been the longer upon this, to give us a right Notion of this Matter, and that we may the more diſtinctly underſtand the true Reaſon why our Saviour does require ſo much earneſtneſs and importunity of Prayer on our part; not at all to work upon God, and to diſpoſe him to ſhew Mercy to us (for that he is always inclinable to, when ever we are fit for it) but only to diſpoſe and qualifie us to receive the Grace and Mercy of God, with greater advantage to our ſelves.

Fifthly,

5. Provided moreover, that we be not confident of our ſelves, and of the force and ſtrength of our own Reſolution. We know not our ſelves, nor the frailty and weakneſs of our own Reſolution, 'till we are tried. 'Tis wiſe Advice which *Solomon* gives us, and never more ſeaſonable than in the day of trial, *Prov.* 3. 5, 6, 7. *Truſt in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own underſtanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths; be not wiſe in thine own eyes*; that is, be not conceited and confident of thine own wiſdom and ſtrength, or ability in any kind; there is a ſecret Providence of God, which mingles it ſelf with the actions and ſpirits of Men, and diſpoſeth of us unknown to our ſelves; and what we think to be the effect of our own ſtrength and reſolution of our own wiſdom and contrivance, proceeds from an higher Cauſe, which unſeen to us, does ſteer and govern us. So the Wiſe Man obſerves, *Prov.* 20. 24. *Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a Man then underſtand his own ways?* And therefore we have reaſon every one to ſay with the Prophet,

Jer.

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Jer. 10. 23. *O Lord I know that the way of Man is not in himſelf, it is not in Man that walketh to direct his ſteps.* Our *feet* will ſoon *ſlip*, if *God* do not *uphold us by his hand.* Remember how ſhamefully the chief of our Lord's Diſciples miſcarried, by too much confidence in himſelf, I mean St. *Peter*; in whoſe fall we may all ſee our own frailty; if God do but permit the Devil to have the winnowing of us, there will be a great deal of chaff found in the beſt of us. What St. *Paul* ſaid of himſelf, 2 *Cor.* 12. 10. *When I am weak, then am I ſtrong*, we ſhall all find true, when it comes to the trial; we are then ſtrongeſt, when, in a juſt ſenſe of our own weakneſs, we rely moſt upon the ſtrength and power of God.

6. Provided furthermore, that according to our ability we have been much in the exerciſe of Alms and Charity. For *well-doing*, or *doing good* is ſometimes taken in a narrower ſenſe, not improper here to be mentioned, tho' perhaps not ſo particularly intended here in the Text, for *works of Charity and Alms.* As *Heb.* 13. 16. *But to do*

do good, and to communicate (that is, to the neceſſities of the Poor) *forget not, for with ſuch Sacrifices God is well pleaſed.* This kind of *well-doing* is a ſpecial Preſervative in times of Evil; there is no kind of Grace or Vertue to which there are in Scripture more ſpecial Promiſes made of our Protection and Preſervation from Evil and Suffering, of Support and Comfort under them and Deliverane out of them, than to this of a Charitable and Compaſſionate Conſideration of thoſe who labour under want or Suffering. *Pſal.* 37. 3. *Truſt in the Lord, and do good, ſo ſhalt thou dwell in the Land, and verily thou ſhalt be fed:* And *ver.* 19. ſpeaking of *Righteous* or *Merciful* Men, *They ſhall not be aſhamed in the evil time, and in the days of Famine they ſhall be ſatisfied.* Pſal. 41. 1, 2. *Bleſſed is he that conſidereth the Poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preſerve him, and keep him alive, and he ſhall be bleſſed upon the Earth;* and *thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his Enemies.*

There

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There are likewiſe in the Apocryphal Books Excellent Sayings for the encouragement of Charity, as that which will be particularly conſidered and rewarded to us in the times of Danger and Diſtreſs, in the days of Affliction and Suffering, *Tob.* 4. 7, 8, 9, 10. *Give Alms of thy ſubſtance, and turn not thy face from any Poor Man, and the face of God ſhall not be turned away from thee; if thou haſt abundance, give Alms accordingly, if thou haſt but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little, for thou layeſt up for thy ſelf a good treaſure againſt the day of neceſſity, becauſe that Alms do deliver from death, and ſuffereth not to come into darkneſs.* Eccluſ. 3. 31. Speaking of him that gives Alms, aud is ready to do Kindneſs to others, *He is mindful of that which may come hereafter; and when he falleth he ſhall find a ſtay.* And Chap. 29. 11, 12, 13. *Lay up thy treaſure according to the Commandment of the moſt High, and it ſhall bring thee more profit than Gold, ſhut up alms in thy ſtore-houſes, and it ſhall deliver thee from all affliction, it ſhall fight for*

thee againſt thine Enemies, better than a mighty ſhield, and ſtrong ſpear.

I have often ſaid it, and am verily perſwaded of it, that one of the beſt ſigns of Gods Mercy and Favour to this poor Nation, is, that God hath been pleaſed of late years to ſtir up ſo general a diſpoſition in Men to works of Alms and Charity, and thereby to revive the Primitive Spirit of Chriſtianity, which ſo eminently *abounded in this Grace*, and taught *thoſe who believed in God, to be careful to maintain and practiſe good works*. And nothing gives me greater hopes that God hath Mercy ſtill in ſtore for us, than that Men are ſo ready to ſhew Mercy; there are great Objects to exerciſe our Charity upon in this time of the general ſuſpenſion of Trade and Buſineſs, from an apprehenſion of approaching troubles; by reaſon whereof, both the numbers and the neceſſities of our Poor are greatly and daily increaſed among us; and beſides the Poor of our own Nation, God has ſent us great numbers from abroad; I mean thoſe who are fled hither for ſhelter, from that

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that violent ſtorm of Perſecution which hath lately fallen upon them for the Cauſe of our common Religion. According to the compaſſion we ſhew to them, we may expect that God will either preſerve us from the like Sufferings, or graciouſly ſupport us under them. What do we know, but that God is now trying us, and hath purpoſely put this oportunity into our hands, of preventing or mitigating, or ſhortning our own Sufferings, according as we extend our Charity and Pity to thoſe who have ſuffered ſo deeply for the Cauſe of God, and his truth.

7. Provided in the laſt Place, and above all, that we be ſincere in our Religion, and endeavour to be univerſally good, and *holy in all manner of Converſation*, and *to abound in all the fruits of righteouſneſs, which are by Jeſus Chriſt, to the praiſe and glory of God*. This is the largeſt ſenſe of *well-doing*, and the moſt neceſſary of all the reſt, to prepare us for Sufferings, and to give us Courage and Conſtancy under them; and likewiſe to engage the Providence of God to a tender care

of us, and Concernment for us, if he ſhall ſee it fit to bring us into a State of Suffering.

But if we live in open Contempt and Violation of God's Laws, if we make no Conſcience of our Ways and Actions, we cannot poſſibly have any well grounded Truſt and Confidence in God, for *he hates all the workers of iniquity, and* his Providence *ſets it ſelf againſt them* for *evil.* Bad Men draw many Miſchiefs and Inconveniencies upon themſelves, as the Natural Conſequences of their Actions; but beſides this, the Vengeance of God haunts and purſues Evil-doers, and his juſt Providence many times involves them in many Difficulties and Dangers, beſides and beyond the Natural Courſe of things: *Upon the wicked* (ſays *David*) *he will rain ſnares*: So that as ever we expect the comfortable Effects of the Divine Care and Providence, we muſt live in a dutiful Obedience to God's Holy Will and Laws.

Bad Men may make a Profeſſion of the true Religion, and may in ſome ſort

ſort believe it, tho' they do not live according to it; and yet perhaps for all this, out of a meer Generoſity and Obſtinacy of Mind, They cannot bear to be threatned and terrified out of the Profeſſion of the Truth; and will endure a great deal of Trouble and Inconveniences, before they will renounce it; knowing themſelves to be ſo far in the Right, that they ſtand for the Truth, and hoping perhaps thereby to make ſome amends for their bad Practice. But when all is done, nothing gives a Man true Courage and Reſolution, like the Teſtimony of our own Hearts, concerning our own Sincerity, and the Conſcience of well-doing. And on the contrary, he that hath not the Reolution and Patience to mortifie his Luſts, and to reſtrain his Appetites, and to ſubdue his irregular Paſſions, for the ſake of God and Religion, will not eaſily bring himſelf to ſubmit to great Sufferings upon that Account. There is conſiderable Difficulty in the Practice of Religion, and the reſolute Courſe of a Holy Life; but ſurely it is much eaſier *to live* as Religion

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requires we ſhould do, than *to lay down our Lives* for it; and (as I have told you upon another Occaſion) he that cannot prevail with himſelf *to live like a Saint*, will much more hardly be perſwaded *to die a Martyr*. I Proceed to the

Third Point, namely, what ground of Comfort and Encouragement the Conſideration of God under the Notion of *a faithful Creator*, does afford to us under all our Sufferings for a good Conſcience and a good Cauſe. *Let them that ſuffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him, in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.* And in this I ſhall be very brief.

And this is a firm ground of Comfort and Encouragement to us, under all our Sufferings for God, to conſider him as the Author of our Beings, or as it is expreſt in the Text, *as a faithful Creator*; one that is not fickle and inconſtant in his Affection and Kindneſs to his Creatures; but is true to his own Deſign; and will not abandon and forſake

ſake the Work of his own Hands: So great a Benefit as that of our Beings, freely conferr'd upon us, is but an earneſt of God's further Kindneſs to us, and Future care of us; if by our ill Carriage towards him, we do not render our ſelves unworthy and incapable of it: That we are God's Creatures, is a Demonſtration that he hath a Kindneſs for us; if he had not, he would never have made us; as it is excellently ſaid in the Wiſdom of *Solomon*, Chap. 11. 23, 24. *Thou haſt mercy upon all, for thou loveſt all the things that are, and abhorreſt nothing which thou haſt made: For never wouldeſt thou have made any thing, if thou hadſt hated it.* And ver. 26. *Thou ſpareſt all, for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of Souls* Serm. XV.

To whom then may we with ſo much Confidence Commit our ſelves, as to him who freely gave us our Being? From whom may we expect ſo tender a Regard and Conſideration, of our Caſe, and all the Circumſtances of it; as from this great Founder and Benefactor? For *he that made us knows our Frame, and whereof we are*

made, and how much we are able to bear; he conſiders our Strength, or rather our Weakneſs, and what Courage and Reſolution he hath endued us withal, and what Comfort and Support we ſtand in need of in the day of Tribulation. And as they who make Armour, are wont to try that which they think to be good and well temper'd, with a ſtronger Charge, not to break and hurt it, but to prove and praiſe it. So God exerciſeth thoſe whom he hath fitted and tempered for it, with manifold Temptations, *that the tryal of their faith*, as St. *Peter* expreſſeth it, 1 *Pet.* 1. 7. *being much more precious than of gold tried in the Fire, may be found unto praiſe, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jeſus Chriſt.*

So that this Conſideration that we are God's Creatures, does (as I may ſay) oblige him in Faithfulneſs to his own Act, and in Conſequence of his bringing us into Being at firſt, to be concern'd for us afterwards, ſo as never to abandon us nor quite to take away his loving-kindneſs and Mercy from us; till we are good for nothing

nothing, and do in a manner ceaſe to be what he made us, that is *Reaſonable Creatures.* A Perſon or People muſt have proceeded to the utmoſt degree of degeneracy, when God will conſider them no longer as his Creatures, nor ſhew any Pity or Favour to them; things muſt be come to extremity, when God deals thus with us, as he threatned the People of *Iſrael*, *Iſa.* 27. 11. *When the boughs are withered, they ſhall be broken off, and ſet on fire: for it is a People of no underſtanding: therefore he that made them, will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them, will ſhew them no favour:* Serm. XV.

And now I have done with the *Three* Points which I propoſed to handle from this Text, and the Diſcourſe which I have made upon them, does all along apply it ſelf, by directing us how we ought *to commit our ſelves* to the Providence of God, in all Caſes of Danger and Suffering, eſpecially for the Cauſe of God and his Truth, *viz.* in the faithful diſcharge of our Duty and a good Conſcience, and by a firm Truſt

VOL. III. Truth and Confidence in the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of the Divine Providence, not doubting but that *who made us, and knows our frame*, will have a tender Care of us, and *not ſuffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*

And as to our preſent Danger, and that Terrible Storm which threatens us, let us pray to God, if it be his will, to divert it; but if otherwiſe he hath determined, to fit and prepare us for it. And let us be fervent and earneſt in our Prayers to him; not that he is moved by our importunity, but that we may thereby be qualified and made fit to receive the Mercy which we beg of him.

And let us take this Occaſion to do that which we ſhould have done without it, *to break off our Sins by Repentance, and to turn every one of us from the evil of our ways*; that hereby we may render God propitious to us, and put our ſelves under the more immediate Care and Protection of his Providence; that we may prevent his Judgments, and turn away his wrath and diſpleaſure

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diſpleaſure from us, as he did once from a great and ſinful City and People, upon their ſincere Humiliation and Repentance, *Jonah* 3. 10. where it is ſaid of the People of *Niniveh*, *That God ſaw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had ſaid that he would do unto them, and he did it not.* Above all, let us be ſincere in the Profeſſion of our Religion, and conſcientious in the Practice of it; nothing will bear us up under great Trials and Sufferings, like *the teſtimony of a good Conſcience, void of offence towards God and Men,*

I will conclude this whole Diſcourſe with thoſe Apoſtolical Bleſſings and Prayers, *Coloſ.* 1. 10, 11. *That ye may walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleaſing, being fruitful in every good work, ſtrengthned with all might according to his glorious Power, unto all patience, and long-ſuffering, with joyfulneſs.* And 2 *Theſ.* 2. 16, 17. *Now our Lord Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, and God even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlaſting Conſolation and*

and good hope through Grace, comfort your hearts, and ſtabliſh you in every good word, and work. To him be Glory and Dominion, for Ever, and Ever, Amen.

SERM.

SERMON XVI.

Of the Work aſſign'd to every Man, and the Seaſon for doing it.

JOHN IX. 4.

I muſt work the work of him that ſent me, while it is day: The night cometh when no man can work.

THeſe words our Bleſſed Saviour ſpake of himſelf, whilſt he was upon Earth; in which he tells us, that he was ſent by God into the World, and had a certain Work and Imployment appointed him during his Abode in it. A great Work indeed! to inſtruct, and reform, and ſave Mankind.

kind. A work of great Labour, and Pains, and Patience, not to be done in a ſhort time; and yet the time for doing it was not long, after he came into the World: It was a good while before he began it, and after he began it, the time of Working was not long, before the Night came and put an End to it: *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day: The night cometh when no man can work.*

But that which our Saviour here ſpeaks of himſelf, and which properly belongs to him, and no other; may yet be accommodated to every Man, with ſome Allowance for the Difference and Diſproportion. For tho' every Man be not ſent by God into the World, after ſo peculiar a manner, and upon ſo particular and vaſt a Deſign: Yet upon a general Account, every Man is ſent by God into this World, and hath a Work given him to do in it, which he is concern'd vigorouſly to mind and to proſecute with all his Might. And tho' every Man be not ſent to ſave the whole World, as the Son of God was, yet every Man is ſent by God into

into the World, *to work out his own Salvation*, and to take Care of *that* in the firſt Place, and then to promote the Salvation of others, as much as in him lies. So that every one of us may, in a very good Senſe, accommodate theſe Words of our Saviour to himſelf: *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is day: The night cometh when no man can work.* Serm. XVI.

I ſhall therefore at this time take the Liberty to handle theſe words according to this moral Accommodation of them, and apply what our Saviour here ſays of himſelf to every Man that cometh into the World: And this I ſhall do, by ſhewing theſe *three* things.

Firſt, That every Man hath a Work aſſigned him to do in this World, by him that ſent him into it; and may in ſome Senſe ſay, as our Bleſſed Saviour did of himſelf, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me.*

Secondly, That there is a certain and limited

Vol. III. limited time for every Man to do this Work in. *While it is day.*

Thirdly, that after this Seaſon is expired, there will be no further Oportunity of working. *The Night cometh when no man can work.*

Firſt, Every Man hath a Work aſſigned him to do in this World, by him that ſent him into it; and may in ſome ſenſe ſay, as our Bleſſed Saviour did of himſelf; *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me.* God who made Man a Reaſonable Creature, and hath endowed him with Faculties, whereby he is capable of knowing and ſerving him; hath appointed him a Work and Service ſuitable to theſe Faculties: And having infuſed an immortal Soul into this Earthy Body, hath certainly deſigned him for a State beyond this Life, in which he ſhall be for ever happy or Miſerable, according as he uſeth and demeanes himſelf in this World.

So that the Work which every one of us hath to do in this World. is to prepare

prepare and fit our ſelves for that Eternal Duration which remains for us after Death. For the Life which we live now in this World is a time of Exerciſe, a ſhort ſtate of Probation and Tryal, in order to a durable and endleſs ſtate, in which we ſhall be immutably fixt in another World. This World, into which we are now ſent for a little while, is as it were God's School, in which immortal Spirits, clothed with Fleſh, are trained and bred up for Eternity; and therefore the beſt, the only ſure way to be happy for ever, is, ſo to improve the ſhort and uncertain time of this Life, that we may approve our ſelves to God in this World, and enjoy him in the next; or (as St. *Paul* expreſſeth it) *that having our fruit unto Holineſs, our end may be everlaſting Life.* Serm. XVI.

And this Work conſiſts in theſe *three* things.

I. In the Care of our own Salvation.

II. In doing what we can, to promote the Salvation of others.

III. And in order to both theſe, in the careful Improvement and good Huſbandry of our time.

I. In the Care of our own Salvation. And this consists in *two* things.

1. In the Worship of Almighty God.

2. In the careful and conscientious Practice and Obedience of his Holy Laws.

1. The care of our own Salvation consists in the Pious and devout Worship of Almighty God; that we honour him, and pay him that Homage and Respect, which is due from Creatures to him that made them, and is the great Soveraign, and Judge of the World that we have an inward Reverence and Esteem of him, and that we express this by all solemn external acknowledgments of him; as by praying to him for the supply of our Wants; by praising him for all the Blessings and Benefits which we have received at his Hands; and that we set apart constant and solemn times for the Performance of these Duties; and then when we are employed in them, we be serious, and hearty, and attentive to what we are about, and perform every part of Divine Worship with those Circumstances of Reverence and Respect, which may testifie

teſtifie our awful Senſe of the Divine Majeſty, and our inward and profound Veneration of him, with whom we have to do. And this is that which is directly and properly *Religion.* Serm. XVI.

2. This Care of our own Salvation, does conſiſt likewiſe in the conſcientious and conſtant Obedience and Practice of all God's Holy Laws, in the Conformity of our Lives and Actions to the Laws which he hath given us, whether they be natural or written upon our Hearts, or made known to us by the Revelation of his Word; that we govern our Paſſions by Reaſon, and moderate our ſelves in the uſe of ſenſual Delights, ſo as not to tranſgreſs the Rules of Temperance and Chaſtity; that we demean our ſelves towards others, and converſe with them with Juſtice and Fidelity, with Kindneſs and Charity.

Theſe are the Summ of the Divine Laws, and the Heads of our Duty towards our ſelves and others; all which are more powerfully enforced upon us by the Revelation of the Goſpel, and the plain Promiſes and Threatnings of it; the Faith of Chriſt being the moſt firm and effectual Principle both of Pi-

ety towards God, and of Universal Obedience to all his particular Commands.

And this is the great work which God hath sent us to do in the World. So the Wise Man sums up our Duty, *Eccl.* 12. 13. *Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.* The Fear and Reverence of the Divine Majesty is the great Foundation and Principle of Religion; but Obedience to God's Laws is the Life and Practice of it. God does not expect that we should spend the greatest part of our time, in the immediate Acts of Religion, and in the solemn Duties of his Worship and Service; but only that we should allot a fitting Portion of our time to these, according to Circumstances of our Condition in this World, and the Example of Holy and Good Men that are in the like Circumstances with our selves. For such is the Goodness of God, that he does not only allow us to provide for the Necessities and Conveniencies of this Life; but hath made it our Duty so to do. It is one of the Precepts of the Gospel, which the Apostle chargeth the Bishops and Teachers of the Gospel to inculcate fre-

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frequently upon Chriſtians, *that they which have believed in God, ſhould be careful to maintain good works*, that is, to employ themſelves in the works of an honeſt Calling, *for neceſſary uſes*; that is, for the ſupport of their Families, and the relief of thoſe who are in want and neceſſity. And the Apoſtle lays great weight and ſtreſs upon this, as a very great Duty, *Tit.* 3. 8. *This is a faithful ſaying, and theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works. Theſe things are good and profitable unto Men*; that is, of general benefits and advantage to Mankind.

So that no Man's Calling is a hinderance to Religion, but a part of it; and by Performing the Duties of Piety in their proper Seaſons, and ſpending the reſt of our time in any honeſt and uſeful Emplopment, we may make our whole Life a perpetual ſerving of God; we may *glorifie God* in our *eating and drinking*, and in all other lawful and uſeful actions of Life. In ſerving the Occaſions and Neceſſities of Life, with Sobriety and Temperance, and in mannaging our Worldy Com-

merce with Juſtice and Integrity, we may ſerve God, and perform conſiderable Duties of Religion.

So that provided we do nothing that is ſinful. and manage the Actions and Concernments of this Life, with a due regard and ſubſerviency to the great intereſts of Eternity, we may do the work of God all the while we are providing for our ſelves, and employed in the works of an honeſt Calling: For God, who hath deſigned this Life in order to the other, conſiders the neceſſities of our preſent ſtate, and allows us to make proviſion for it.

There are ſome Perſons indeed, whoſe Birth and Condition ſets them above the common Employments of Life, and the Works of an ordinary Calling: But theſe alſo have a work given them to do; for God hath ſent no Man into the World to no purpoſe, and only *to take his paſtime therein*; *neque enim ita generati ſumus à natura, ut ad ludum & jocum facti eſſe videamur; ſed ad ſeveritatem potius, & quædam ſtudia graviora atque majora; for we are not* (ſays *Tally de Off. Lib.* 1.) *ſo framed by Nature, as if we were made for ſport and jeſt; but for more ſerious Employ-*

Employments, and for greater and weightier buſineſs; and thoſe who are tied to no particular Calling, may allow ſo much larger portions of their time to Religion, and the Service of God; and God likewiſe expects from them, that they ſhould be uſeful to Mankind in ſome higher and nobler way, according to the publickneſs of their ſtation, and influence. Such Perſons may be ſerviceable to their Country, and the Affairs of Government, and in the care of publick Juſtice, and may employ their time in preparing and rendring themſelves more fit for this Service. They may find a great deal of work to do in the good government of their Families, and in the prudent care and management of their Eſtates, and in reconciling differences among their Neighbours, and in conſidering the neceſſities of the Poor, and providing for their ſupply. Serm. XVI.

So that beſides the proper work of Religion, and the more immediate Service of God, every Man in the World, how exempt ſoever his Condition be from the common care and drudgery of Humane Life, may find work enough wherein he may uſefully employ all his

Vol. III. time, and provide for his own, and for the common benefit of Mankind; and God expects it as a Duty from ſuch, that every Man ſhould employ himſelf in ſome work or other, ſuitable to the ſtation in which God hath placed him in this World.

II. The work which God hath given us to do in the World, conſiſts in doing what we can to further and promote the Salvation of others. This chiefly lies upon *us*, who are *the Miniſters of God*, and *to whom the word of Reconciliation is committed.* We are more eſpecially Commiſſioned and Appointed for this work, and are *Ambaſſadors for Chriſt, to beſeech Men in his ſtead to be reconciled to God.* We are ſent by God in a more peculiar manner, and appointed for this very work, *to watch for Mens Souls*, and to be the Inſtruments and Means of their Eternal Happineſs. And therefore we who are ſent by God in a more peculiar manner, and have this work aſſigned to us to do in the World, ought to be very vigorous and induſtrious in it; and this, whether we conſider the Nature of our Employment, or the Glorious Reward of it.

I. If

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I. If we consider the Nature of our Employment, both in respect of the Honour and the Happiness of it. 'Tis the most Honourable work that Mortal Man can be employed in; 'tis the same in kind, and in the main end and design of it, with that of the Blessed Angels; for we also are *Ministring Spirits, sent forth by God to Minister, for the good of those who shall be heirs of Salvation.* We are *the Messengers* and *Ambassadors of God* to Men, sent to treat with them about the terms of their Peace and Reconciliation with God, to offer Salvation to them, and to direct them to the best ways and means of procuring it. Nay, we have the Honour to be employed in the very same work that the Son of God was, when he was upon Earth, *to seek and to save them that are lost*; and *to call Sinners to Repentance*; and to carry on that work, whereof he himself laid the Foundation when he was in the World. And what greater Honour can be put upon the Sons of Men, than to help forward that glorious Design and Undertaking of the Son of God, for the Salvation of Mankind?

And

VOL. III. And 'tis an Employment no leſs Happy than Honourable; 'tis not to drudge about the mean and low Concernments of this Life, a perpetual toil and care about *what we ſhall eat and drink, and wherewithal we ſhall be cloathed*, which is the buſineſs of a Worldly Employment; but it is a direct and immediate *ſeeking of the Kingdom of God, and his Righteouſneſs*, and a continual endeavour to promote theſe. It does not conſiſt in the labour of our Body, and in Bodily toil; but in the delightful exerciſe of our Minds, about the beſt and nobleſt Objects, God, and Heaven, and Eternity; in an earneſt and faithful endeavour by all wiſe ways and means to gain Souls to God, and *to turn Sinners from the error of their ways*, and to prevent their Eternal Ruine and Deſtruction; and next to the procuring of our own Happineſs, to be inſtrumental to the Happineſs of others, which is certainly the moſt pleaſant and noble Work that we can poſſibly be employed in; eſpecially if we conſider, that by the very nature of our Employment, we do at the ſame time, and by the very ſame means, carry on both theſe deſigns, of the

the Salvation of our ſelves, and o- Serm.
thers. So St. *Paul* tells *Timothy*, when XVI.
he exhorts him upon this very Conſide-
ration, *to give himſelf wholly* to this Bleſſed Work; becauſe, ſays he, *in doing this, thou ſhalt both ſave thy ſelf, and them that hear thee*, 1 *Tim.* 4. 16. And when two of the greateſt and beſt deſignes in the World, our own Happineſs, and the Salvation of others, do ſo happily meet in one, and are jointly carried one by the ſame labour; this ought to be a great ſpur and incitement to us, to be vigorous and unwearied, and *abundant in the work of the Lord*; and a mighty encouragement to us *to preach the word, to be inſtant in ſeaſon, and out of ſeaſon*, and *to be Examples to others, in Word, in Converſation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity*; as St. *Paul* chargeth *Timothy* in the moſt ſolemn and awful manner, *before God, and the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who ſhall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his Kingdom*, 1 *Tim.* 4. 12. and 2 *Tim.* 4. 1. And then.

2. If we conſider the glorious Reward of this work. If we be Faithful and Induſtrious in it, it will advance

vance us to a higher degree of Glory and Happineſs in the other World. *They that be wiſe* (ſays the Prophet, *Dan.* 12. 3.) *ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the Firmament, and they that turn many to righteouſneſs, as the Stars for ever and ever.* They that are induſtrious in this work, as they are *worthy of double honour* in this World, ſo they ſhall ſhine with a double glory and luſtre in the other.

But tho' this work of promoting the Salvation of others, be chiefly incumbent upon theſe whoſe Office it is to attend upon this very thing; yet we are all of us concerned in it, according to the advantages and oportunities we have for it. Every Man is concerned to help forward the Salvation of his Brother, and not to let him periſh, if we can help it; and it is in every Man's power to contribute ſomething to this Bleſſed Work of ſaving others by ſeaſonable Counſel and Advice, by kind and gentle reproof, but eſpecially by a Holy and Exemplary Converſation, by a ſhining Virtue, which hath a ſilent power of perſuaſion, and I know not what ſecret charm

charm and attraction to draw and allure others to the imitation of it. Serm. XVI.

III. And in order to both theſe, the ſaving of our ſelves, and others, this work, which God hath given us to do in the World, conſiſts in the careful uſe and good husbandry of our time; for without this, neither of the other can be promoted and carried on to any purpoſe. Time is the ſeaſon and oportunity of carrying on of any work, and for that reaſon is one of the moſt valuable things; and yet nothing is more waſtfully ſpent, and more prodigally ſquandred away by a great part of Mankind than this, which next to our Immortal Souls is of all other things moſt precious; becauſe upon the right uſe or abuſe of our time, our Eternal Happineſs or Miſery does depend. Men have generally ſome guard upon themſelves, as to their Mony and Eſtates, and will not with eyes open ſuffer others to rob and deprive them of it: But we will let any body almoſt rob us of our time, and are contended to expoſe this precious Treaſure to every dodies rapine and extortion and can quietly look on, whilſt Men thruſt in their hands, and take it out

by

Vol. III. by whole handfuls, as if it were of no greater value then Silver was in *Solomon's* days, no more than *the ſtones in the ſtreet.* And yet when it is gone, all the Silver and Gold in the World cannot purchaſe and fetch back the leaſt moment of it, when perhaps we would give all the World for a very ſmall part of that time, which we parted with upon ſuch cheap and eaſie terms.

Good God! what a ſtupid and ſenſeleſs Prodigality is this! do we conſider what we do, when we give away ſuch large portions of our time to our eaſe and pleaſure, to diverſion and idleneſs to trifling and unprofitable Converſation, to the making and receiving of impertinent viſits, and the uſual and almoſt inſeparable attendants thereof, ſpitful obſervations upon them that are preſent, and ſlandering and backbiting thoſe that are abſent; (For the great deſign of moſt People in viſits, is not to better one another, but to ſpie and *make* faults, and not to *mend* them; to get time off their hands, to ſhew their fine Cloaths, and to recommend themſelves to the mutual contempt of one another, by a plentiful impertinence;) when we part with it by wholeſale

ſale in ſleep and dreſſing, and can ſpend more Mornings between the Comb and the Glaſs, and the Afternoon at Plays, and whole Nights in Gaming, or in Riot, and Lewdneſs, and Intemperance; in all which People commonly waſte their Mony and their Time together! Serm. XVI.

Nay how do even the beſt of us miſplace this precious Treaſure; and tho' we do not employ it to wicked purpoſes, and in Works of Iniquity, yet we do not apply it to the beſt and nobleſt uſe, to the Glory of God, and the Good and Salvation of Men! By thus laying out this Treaſure, we might *lay up for our ſelves treaſures in heaven*, and help others on in the Way thither.

Thus our Bleſſed Saviour employed his precious time, in *going about doing good*, in all kinds and upon all Occaſions, healing the Bodies, and enlightning the Minds, and ſaving the Souls of Men: This was his Buſineſs, and this was his Delight; it was *his meat and drink*, and his very Life, he ſpent himſelf in it, and ſacrificed his Eaſe, and his Safety, and his Life to theſe great Ends, for which he came into the World; he conſi-

Vol. III. conſidered the Goodneſs and the Greatneſs of his work, and the little time he had to do it in, which made him inceſſently induſtrious in it, and to run the Race which was ſet before him with great ſpeed, and *to work while it as day*, becauſe he knew *the night would come when no man can work.* And this brings me to the

Second thing, I obſerved from the Text, namely, that there is a certain and limited time for every Man to do this Work in; *while it is day. I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, whilſt it is day.* And this *day* compreheads all the Oportunites of our Life, which will ſoon be over, and therefore had need to be well ſpent. A great part of our Life is paſt, before the ſeaſon of Working begins; it is a great while before the uſe of our Reaſon begins, and we come to have our Senſes exerciſed to diſcern between Good and Evil; before our Underſtandings are ripe for the ſerious Conſideration of God and Religion, and for the due Care of our Souls, and of the Eternal Concernment of another World; ſo that this firſt part of our Life is in a great Meaſure uſeleſs, and unprofitable to us;

us, in regard to our great Deſign. For Infancy and Childhood are but the Dawnings of this Day, and no fit time to work in; and Youth, which is as the Morning of this Day, tho' it is the Flower of our Time, and the moſt proper ſeaſon of all other for the Remembrance of God, and the Impreſſions of Religion; yet it is uſually poſſeſt by Vanity and Vice; the common Cuſtom and Practice of the World, hath devoted this beſt part of our Age to the worſt Employments, to the Service of Sin and of our Luſts. How very few are there that lay hold of this Opportunity, and employ it to the beſt Purpoſes! And yet the following Courſe of our Lives, doth in a great meaſure depend upon it; for moſt Perſons do continue and hold on in the Way in which they ſet out at firſt, whether it be good or bad. And thoſe who neglect to improve this firſt Opportunity of their Lives, do ſeldom recover themſelves afterwards. God's Grace may ſeize upon Men in any part of their Lives; but according to the moſt ordinary Methods of it, the Foundations and Principles of Religion and Virtue are moſt commonly laid in a pious and virtuous E- Serm. XVI.

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ducation. This is the great opportunity of our Lives, which ſetleth and fixeth moſt Men, either in a good or bad Courſe, and the Fortune of their whole Lives does uſually follow it, and depend upon it.

'Tis true indeed our Day continues many times a great while longer, and we are to work while it continues; and 'tis never too late to begin to do well, and to enter upon a good Courſe: But there is no ſuch proper and advantagious Seaſon for the beginning of this work, as in our youth and tender Years. *This is the accepted time, this is the day of ſalvation.* God's Grace is then moſt forward and ready to aſſiſt us; and we are then leaſt of all indiſpos'd for the receiving of the Impreſſions of it; and the Impreſſions of it do then go deepeſt into our minds, and are moſt laſting and durable. But if we neglect this Opportunity, we provoke God by Degrees to withdraw his Grace, and to take away his Holy Spirit from us, and by degrees we ſettle in vicious Habits, and are every day more and more *hardened through the deceitfulneſs of ſin.* It is never too late to work while the day laſts; but the ſooner we begin this work, and ſet about it in good

good earneſt, the eaſier we ſhall find it; if we defer it late, every ſtep will be up the Hill, and againſt the Grain. Serm. XVI.

Thirdly, After this Seaſon is expired, there will be no further Opportunity of working; when this day is once at an end, then *cometh the Night when no man can work*. The Night is a time unfit for work, when we can hardly do any thing, if we had never ſo great a mind to it; and there is ſuch a Night coming upon every one of us, and Wo be to us if we have our Work to do when the Night overtakes us.

There is uſually an Evening before this Night, when it will be very difficult for us, and next to impoſſible, to do this Work; and this is the time of Sickneſs and Old-age, in which men are commonly unfit for any work; but moſt of all that which requires the whole force and vigour of our Minds, the buſineſs of Religion. If we attempt this work then, we ſhall go very heartleſly about it, and do it very imperfectly, and be forc'd to ſlubber it over, and to huddle it up in great haſte and confuſion, and ſo as we can hardly hope that God will accept it. For how unfit are Men to do any thing, when they are full of the Senſe of their

own Infirmities, and Life it ſelf is become ſo great a Burthen to them, that they are hardly fit to ſtand under it! How uncapable ſhall we then be of doing the greateſt and moſt momentous work of our Lives, when our Faculties are almoſt quite ſpent and worn out, and all the Powers of Life are decay'd in us; when our Underſtandings are dark and dull, our Memories frail and treacherous, and our *hearts* hard and *deceitful above all things!* When Sickneſs and Old-age overtake us, we ſhall then find to our ſorrow that *ſufficient for* that *day is the evil thereof*; we ſhall have need then of nothing elſe to do, but to bear our Infirmities with patience and decency; and it is well if we can rally together of the broken Forces of our Reaſon, ſo much as may be a ſufficient Guard to us againſt Peeviſhneſs and Diſcontent; we had need then have nothing elſe to do, but to be old and weak, to be ſick and die.

Beſides, how can we expect that God ſhould accept of any work that we do at ſuch a time? with what face can we put off God with the dregs of our Life? or how can we hope that he will be pleaſed with the ſervice of thoſe Years, which we our ſelves *take no plea-*

ſure

ſure in? if we offer the lame in Sacrifice, Serm.
is it not evil? and if we offer the blind, XVI.
is it not evil? offer it now to thy Gover-
nour, and ſee if he will be pleaſed with
thee?

And Sickneſs is commonly as bad a time as Old Age, and uſually incumber'd with greater Difficulties, and clog'd with more Indiſpoſitions. If a violent Diſtemper ſeize upon us, it many times takes away the uſe of our Reaſon and deprives us of all opportunity of Conſideration; it makes us both inſenſible of the danger of our Condition, and incapable of uſing the means to avoid it. And if we have neglected Religion before, and have put off the great Work of our Life to the end of it, our Opportunity is irrecoverably loſt; for there is nothing to be done in Religion, when our Reaſon is once departed from us; *the Night is* then *come* indeed, and *darkneſs hath overtaken us*; and tho' we be ſtill alive, yet are we as unfit for any Work, as if we were naturally dead.

And this is no ſuch rare and extraordinary Caſe; for it happens to many; and every Man that wilfully defers the work of Religion and Repentance to a dying

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But if God be more merciful unto us, and viſit us with ſuch a Sickneſs, as leaves us the uſe of our Underſtandings; yet all that we do in Religion at ſuch a time, proceeds from ſo violent a Cauſe, from the preſent terror of Death, and the dreadful apprehenſion of that Eternal Miſery which is juſt ready to ſwallow us up, that it is one of the hardeſt things in the World, not only for others, but even for our ſelves, to know whether our Reſolutions, and this ſudden and haſty Fit of Repentance be ſincere or not. For it is natural, and almoſt unavoidable, for a Man to Repent and be ſorry for what he hath done, when he is going to Execution: But the Great Queſtion is, what this Man would do, if his Life were ſpared? whether his Repentance would hold good, and he would become a new Man, and change his former courſe of Life, or relapſe into it again? And it is by no means certain, that he would

would not be as bad as he was before: Serm. Becauſe we ſee many, who, when they XVI. lie upon a Sick Bed, give all imaginable teſtimony of a deep Sorrow, and a hearty Repentance for their Sins, who yet upon their Recovery return to their former Sins with a greater appetite, and make themſelves *ten times more the Children of wrath than they were before.* So that all the work that we can do at ſuch a time, ought not to be much reckoned upon, and can give us little or no Comfort; becauſe it is ſo infinitely uncertain whether it be real and ſincere, and whether the effect of ſo violent a Cauſe would laſt and continue, if the Cauſe were removed. Therefore *we ſhould work while it is day*; for whatever we do in this Evening of our Lives, will be done with very great difficulty, and with very doubtful ſucceſs.

But beſides this Evening, there is *a night coming when no man can work*; Death will ſeize upon us, and then our ſtate will be irrecoverably concluded; after that it will be impoſſible for us to do any thing towards our own Salvation, or to have any thing done for us by others; the Prayers of the living will not avail the dead, *as the Tree falls ſo it lies*;

lies; there is no wiſdom, nor counſel, nor device in the grave whither we are going; therefore, according to the Counſel of the Wiſe Man, *what our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might.*

This Counſel concerns all Ages and Perſons. I will apply it to the Young, in the words of the wiſe Preacher, *Eccleſ.* 12. 1. *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou ſhalt ſay; I have no pleaſure in them.* To them who are in the vigour of their Age, in the words of the Prophet, *Iſa. Ch.* 55. 6. *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.* And to them that are old, in the words of another Prophet, *Jer.* 13. 16. *Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cauſeth darkneſs, and before your feet ſtumble upon the dark Mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the ſhadow of death, and make it groſs darkneſs.* And let us every one of us, of what Age or Condition ſoever, apply it to our ſelves, in the words of our Bleſſed Saviour here in the Text, *I muſt work the works of him that ſent me, while it is Day: the Night cometh, when no Man can work.*

FINIS.